

St Andrew's on the Terrace 12 August 2018 Pentecost 12 Being Christian: 'Truth, Talk and Anger'

Readings for the Gathering

Epistle

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body. 26 In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the anger a foothold. 28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. 29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ you are forgiven. 5 1 Follow this example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice.

Gospel

Mark 11:15-19

15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." 18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. 19 When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

Contemporary reading

Understanding and befriending anger by Karla McLaren

<https://karlamclaren.com/2013/03/29/understanding-and-befriending-anger/>

Anger's job is to help you set and maintain effective interpersonal boundaries. At its most subtle level, anger helps you uphold mutual respect and keep open the lines of communication in your relationships. Sadly, most of us weren't taught about the subtleties of emotional nuance (understanding nuance helps you identify emotions at many different levels of activation), and as a result, we tend to identify anger only *after* it gets to the level of a mood. Since most of us were never taught how to take effective actions with our anger, this mood-state can often be acted out in very painful ways.

We've all been on the wrong end of someone's badly managed anger, and we've all used anger as a bludgeon (or sarcasm as a stiletto). In fact, when most of us think of anger, we see a red-faced bull or something like it. Anger has a pretty terrible reputation. However, people can also experience a great deal of pain and trouble in their lives if they don't have *enough* anger..... Anger is also connected with justice; not only for yourself, but for others as well. Your anger can be evoked when you see someone being stripped of their sense of self, their rights, or their position. Anger is a very social emotion; if you can understand its nuances and subtleties, it can help you become an effective voice for social justice.

Anger contains a great deal of focused, protective energy, and when you don't have enough of it, you may struggle to set boundaries and protect yourself in relationships (or to protect the rights and dignity of others). Without your healthy anger, you can lose your vitality and your capacity to react and respond in resilient ways.

The Reflection for the Gathering

One of the things which people who come here value the most, I am told frequently is the community which is this church. When I hear that though I always think – "But there's a reason why this community has the good qualities it does. I wonder if you realise that?" St Andrew's and any church

isn't a community like a drop in centre or a bowling club or a post natal mums-and-baby coffee group or a men's shed. It is a group of people drawn together by their search for the meaning of life. It is a place where the deepest of our deepest values are discussed and reflected upon. It is a community which takes its place in a millennia long line of faithful human beings, it is a community called out to be different, to be holy, meaning special, to be as like its founder as people possibly can be in a different day and age from when he lived.

Just before the reading from Ephesians which was our first reading, the writer to this church located in what is now modern day Turkey, a challenge is laid down for this fledgling church. They are reminded in verses 20-24 of chapter 4 that they have been taught to put off their old selves and take on a new persona. Their letter writer recalls for them:

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

'Put off your old self', 'be made new' and 'put on the new self'. We might say now in the language of depth psychology 'relegate your self-centred ego', 'learn about your true Self' and 'operate from that true Self instead'. This resonates with Romans 12 verse 2 "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be *transformed by the renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what .. is . good, pleasing and perfect....

Today's reading then gives examples of how someone operating out of their new and true Self would be compared with how they might have acted before. In this part of the letter the writer is dealing with how we speak with each other, how we handle the truth, how we deal with our anger. If you go home and get out that dusty Bible and look up Ephesians 4 you will find that the instructions about anger are very like what Karla McLaren has written in her contemporary blog printed in the order of service.

We in the church are not meant to be just another community of people like everyone else who *don't* come through these doors. We are often too shy or embarrassed to claim a different quality about our church communities in case we don't measure up, but we are *meant* to be different – more disciplined, more kind, more mature, *because* we have been charged to be a transformed people, we have been challenged to mature into integrated, individuated and whole human beings.

I found a church sign the other day which said. "The church is not full of hypocrites. There is always room for more." Over the years, people outside the church have got the idea that church people are hypocrites because they expect us to be perfect – sometimes we gave them that holier-than-thou impression, sometimes it is their wrong assumption that we are perfect. We are, of course, just a bunch of humans gathering in the same place each Sunday morning. But we are a bunch of humans who have been given a particular mandate on how to live. And we should get worried in the church if we find our mode of living is not better than other groups outside it.

At the Presbytery Gathering last weekend one of the ministers from within the presbytery talked about how he thought the church had got the sin thing all wrong – that traditionally we had labelled people 'sinners' rather than letting them know they were loved, forgiven and accepted. Love and grace, he argued, should be the *first* message people hear from us – that has to do with the way we talk to people and how we speak the truth to each other and to friends and family who never come here or to any other church.

Over recent times I have noticed that health professionals seem to be being trained differently from when I was young. They seem more accepting and helpful, they seem to listen better than they used to, they seem to be more positive and more encouraging. They pick out the most positive statement in what I say and run with that, rather than blaming me over my negatives statements. It's very different from the blaming, shaming talk I used to experience as a child from preachers, school teachers, health professionals, dentists, librarians, and my Girl Guide captain!

This is what the writer to the church at Ephesus is trying to teach those new Christians. They have put on the new Self, allowed that true Self to emerge. Their letter writing penpal is pointing out that the behaviour towards each other that goes with that change from lower case self to upper case Self is to speak the truth; to be angry but not to do the wrong thing with that anger; to be honest and share goods rather than steal them; to talk in a wholesome manner which builds up other people rather than tearing them down. (Maybe contemporary health professionals have been reading Ephesians!)

If we have been damaged in the past, it is our responsibility to deal with that woundedness so we can be free of bitterness, rage and anger, slander and malice. **Then** we are free to be kind, compassionate and forgiving, loving one another.

Life can be tough in our society. Hurts and losses, griefs and disasters dog individuals and families; groups of people are ostracised and rejected for a variety of poor reasons, others struggle to make ends meet. How much would their lives be improved if they met someone who was able to give out to them because in turn they had at their back a faith community which loved and accepted them

I'm ashamed to say my early life training was *not* like that contemporary health professionals seem to be getting. I learned from role models who were judgmental and used shaming and blaming in subtle and non subtle ways. To my horror, when I get tired and busy, I find myself falling back to that default position. My old self, that old ego, reappears and takes over, shutting down the mature true Self which otherwise would stay chilled and welcoming.

That's why we come regularly to church – we need reminding of how we are called to be. We need to refresh, recharge, reboot. So that when we leave here, we can take a deep breath and return kindness for cruelty, show compassion in the face of bullying and forgiveness in the face of rudeness.

I have been very careful *not* to say that we should *not* get angry. Karla McLaren puts it well – we need anger to alert us to injustice, or our own inadequacy. It is how we express that anger which is the important thing. It is also what we get angry about that is significant. The Ephesians passage does not tell us not to get angry. It warns us how to *deal* with anger, but not that anger itself is forbidden.

Jesus' behaviour in the temple has been a conundrum for those who like to think Jesus did no wrong in a perfectly sinless life. Jesus got angry elsewhere in his life, but this incident in the temple is the most violent. There are injustices in this world which *should* make us angry. That kind of anger is an important energiser for action we need to take. St Andrew's is working on developing a marching banner, so we can carry it in marches against injustice. It simply will say 'St Andrews on the terrace speaks out' Anger is the fuel which can help us to speak out, right wrongs and encourage the good. When Jesus turned over the money changers' tables he was siding with the poor who were being fleeced. Even if you brought your own animal to the sacrifice somehow, mysteriously your animal was never good enough and so you were forced to buy a temple provided animal. Of course perfect animals commanded a premium price! Then you could not buy the animal with ordinary currency but had to change your money into temple money. Of course, at a certain rate of exchange at goodness

knows what kind of fee. Poor Jewish worshippers were being ripped off by the holy priesthood of Israel. That *should* have made him angry!

Sometimes our anger is a message to us to get over ourselves and our petty jealousies. It may not be about the person in front of us at all but more about how we think we have been hurt or passed over.

At other times our anger is a call to arms, a call to right injustice done to ourselves but more often, injustice done to others who have not the resources to speak out or whose voice is not heard in the noise of living.

May we carefully discern the difference, continually looking down deep inside ourselves to find and know that true Self. Let us listen carefully for its voice deep within us so the sacred is revealed to us inside our own psyche.

Do not look out there for God, for you and God are one. God is not outside you but within. When we are in touch with that inner reality we will *know the truth*, we will *talk in ways which uplift* and encourage and *we will know and use our anger wisely*.

So may it be

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