

Welcome

We're fewer than 100 hours from election day, so I want to ask you a weird question: which superhero do you most relate to these days? I think a lot of us would like to imagine we're Captain America, doing our patriotic duty and defending the best of American ideals.

But I wonder how many of us over the last month have been able to relate way more to Bruce Banner. You know... the guy who gets angry and turns into the Incredible Hulk?

Yeah... that guy.

If you're old enough to remember the TV show where Lou Ferrigno was the Hulk, you may remember Bruce Banner's famous line: "Don't make me angry. You wouldn't like me when I'm angry!"

In the Avengers movie, that gets a tweak: "That's my secret, Cap," Bruce says just before he transforms. "I'm always angry."

The Hulk is all about anger. And, as a superhero, he paints a pretty accurate picture of how we as a culture feel about anger: it's bad. It's dangerous. The Hulk is a stupid, impulsive beast. He's as likely to punch *you* as he is the bad guy. He's uncontrollable. Bruce works really hard to make sure the anger never gets out.

Anger is bad.

But... there's a *lot* of anger in the air right now. And I'd like to submit that *because* we just write anger off as a bad emotion we're not meant to feel, we don't know how to deal with all the anger around us and *within* us.

We're going to talk about anger today. And here's our assumption: Anger is an emotion we were created to be able to feel. If that's true, then it means anger can't be *bad*. We feel anger for a reason.

Today, we're going to explore how to be angry. What is anger? Why do we feel it? And what are we supposed to do with it?

We're going to begin by worshipping together today because we're going to ground our answers in God's character. We're created in God's image, and we know God gets angry. That's right: God, who is perfect love, gets angry. So we're going to explore what makes Jesus angry, and how he shows us what to do with our anger.

We can learn to know our anger because we know God is good, and God is love. Let's worship together.

Message

We've spent the last month asking how to survive the election that is now only a few days away. We're experiencing this election as one of deep divisions, and as if a global pandemic wasn't enough, we're bearing the stress of a divided nation.

As we've worked through the various experiences we all have as we navigate this season, we've asked, "How do we follow Jesus through this season? What does it look like to bear Jesus' image faithfully as we live together in these next couple of months?"

We have worked hard not to be partisan. The Church has never and will never endorse candidates or parties. Politics is about how we live together, and the Church is deeply political - that "love your neighbor the same way you love yourself" command is a political statement because it's about how we live together. But political and partisan are not the same thing. So while we've talked in this series about how we navigate the complex world of relationships, we have not endorsed candidates or parties or told you how to vote.

This series has asked a lot of us. We believe that real relationships are deep relationships. Catalyst doesn't settle for superficial. So we've had to get real - with ourselves, with God and with each other.

We started with kindness - how it differs from superficial niceness and draws us instead into deeper, more authentic relationships. We explored how to grieve well and with one another. Last week, we wondered how we can insist on being a people of truth in a world of fake news and alternative facts.

Today, we're asking how to be angry. Again, in our culture, we tend to see anger as a negative emotion, one that we should avoid at all costs. But I'd like to suggest today that our dismissal of anger is wrong. Anger is *not* a 'bad' emotion, one that we should avoid feeling. Anger is a good part of a healthy, whole person. Rather than avoid anger, we ought to learn what it's *for*.

[[Scripture Slide 1 - MY TRANS](#)] Turn with me to Ephesians 4. This is where we were last week, when we heard the author's exhortation to tell the truth. I want to read the next instruction with you as well, since it relates to this discussion we're having on anger:

So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. -- Ephesians 4:25-27

Be angry, but don't sin. That distinction is largely lost on us. We think that to be angry *is* to sin. But clearly the author of Ephesians believes otherwise. They consider it entirely possible to be angry and *not* sin. What's more, if you recall last week's discussion, this is about how we live together as God's people in a godless world. So the author of Ephesians fully expects that *when we choose to live together*, we're going to get angry.

Do you hear that? You're going to get on my nerves, and I'm going to get on yours. We're not going to see eye-to-eye on everything. Truth-telling, even in love, can and will be painful. Anger is a *normal* and *natural* part of living together as one body, one spiritual family.

Be angry, don't sin.

Um. Okay... how do we do that? Well, first, we need to figure out what anger is and what triggers it. For that, it might be helpful to explore what made Jesus angry.

[Scripture Slide 2] Rather than throwing out a whole bunch of verses, I want to dive into one specific story from early in his ministry - before he had even called his disciples. Turn with me to Mark 3. This story happens on the Sabbath, and as you know, Judaism has a strict prohibition against working on the Sabbath day. Jesus has already become pretty noteworthy at this point, and it's created quite a lot of hostility between him and the religious elite of the day. Watch how the conflict plays out in the first few verses of Mark 3:

Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand. Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath.

Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone." Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer him.

He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored! -- Mark 3:1-5

Jesus is already famous for his healing ministry, so his enemies watch him to see whether he'll heal this man. If he does, they plan to call him a lawbreaker, one who doesn't keep the Sabbath.

Jesus knew what they planned, so he broke the trap by calling the man to the front. Rather than trying to heal him in secret, or after the gathering was finished, or anything like that, he brings the man front and center and asks a question that drives to the heart of the Sabbath law: is the purpose of Sabbath to keep us from doing good? (If you were here in our Faith & Race series, you may hear echoes here of Jesus' attitude toward rules.)

And *then* Mark tells us Jesus is angry and deeply saddened. By what? *Their hard hearts*.

What's going on here? There is a man in this community who is physically deformed. In Jesus' day, that meant not only that he suffered severe limitations in terms of what he could contribute to the community in terms of work, it *also* meant he was excluded from a huge part of the community's religious life. He was, because of his physical limitations, an outsider.

And now a rabbi comes to town who has the ability to heal such ailments. A man who, in fact, has already performed multiple healings of this type in other communities. How *should* the religious leaders react? They should be *thrilled*. They should be rejoicing that this man will be healed and restored to the community. This should be a day they'll be celebrating for *years*.

But instead, they use the man as a tool, a prop, bait in a trap. They want to use him to discredit this man sent from God to heal what is wounded, to restore what is lost. *That's* what made Jesus angry - that powerful people would be more concerned about their own position and status than this outcast man who had the chance to be restored.

This is a consistent pattern throughout Scripture: what makes God angry is when we fail to live up to who God calls us to be, whether in our own lives (because of personal sin) or corporately (what we call injustice and oppression, or what we could call corporate sin). Again, that shouldn't surprise us because Jesus told us the Greatest Commandment is to love God with everything we are and to love our neighbors the way we love ourselves. So when we *don't* do those things, God gets angry.

Since we're created in God's image, it stands to reason that we can get angry. Because God can get angry.

Here's the catch, though: anger is an emotion, and emotions are non-rational. You know this, right? Emotions don't think. They're not logical. Emotions are dumb. Literally.

And because we're not perfect, all-powerful creators and sustainers of reality like God is, our emotions can be wrong. In other words, our anger can be misdirected or mis-triggered.

Which you already know, right? Can't you think of a time or three when you've gotten angry, and then it turned out you were wrong? I know I find myself in that space more often than I like to admit.

So here's where we have to begin: if we want to follow Ephesians' advice and be angry but don't sin, then we have to first start, when we get angry, by PAUSING and evaluating our anger.

I like to think of anger like a warning light on the dashboard of my brain. It's flashing red, which is alerting me that *something* is wrong. Or like a 'check engine' light on our car. It *probably* means there's something wrong (again, not always - sometimes the light triggers by mistake). And the light doesn't tell me *exactly* what the problem is.

But the wise thing to do is figure out what that light's all about. I'm real dumb when it comes to cars. I have to take mine to a professional and have them tell me what's wrong. Our inner selves can be the same way. I've gotten a lot better at interrogating my own anger thanks to years of therapy with professionals who help me figure out how my brain and heart and spirit work.

Do you know the physical cues that happen when you're getting angry? Does your chest tighten? Do you get anxious? Does your temperature rise? Do your nostrils flare? Do tears rush to your eyes? What are the physical symptoms of that emotional experience?

Knowing can help us catch our anger and STOP, pull over and get to a space where we can evaluate what's going on inside.

Is my anger being triggered by a real injustice? Is someone gaslighting me? Or ignoring and dehumanizing me? Have I borne witness to an injustice?

Or - and this is the tough question - am I being challenged? Is there an insecurity, or maybe a sin, a bias, a prejudice that I haven't recognized (or dealt with) that's been exposed and *that's* why I'm feeling angry?

In my experience, this is a difficult discernment to make. As we saw last week, we tend to give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. We tend always to assume our anger is the righteous kind. So, just like last week, I want to encourage us to flip the script.

When we find ourselves getting angry, what if we start from the assumption that the anger is revealing something inside of our own spirits that needs careful attention? What if we work hard to find that and only if we can't, then begin to look for that injustice or sin that's triggered our anger?

How would that change the next 48 hours? How would that change the days after the election?

Ephesians reminds us that anger can lead to sin. In fact, when we don't take time pretty quickly to stop and examine ourselves, we make space for the devil in our lives. The author of Ephesians recommends not even going to sleep before we make some time to interrogate our anger. The longer we sit with it, the easier it is for us to convince ourselves either it was no big deal (and we can ignore it) or that we were in the right (when we weren't).

Okay so now, let's say we've interrogated our anger and we're sure it's a righteous anger. We've either uncovered that thing in our own lives that needs to change, or we've witnessed an injustice in the world. Now what?

This is where we truly find the gift in anger. Anger gets things done. Anger burns hot, driving the change engine. If I've been called out, if my anger has revealed a personal issue of some kind, that anger I felt can drive me to self-reflection, prayer and transformation.

And if I have witnessed (or experienced) injustice, then anger can motivate me to move forward. To act.

This is exactly what we see Jesus do. If you ask people whether Jesus got angry, they'll likely say yes and cite the time he cleansed the temple. This is the go-to for Christians who want to justify anger. Our image of this story is Jesus walking into the temple, seeing what's going on and hulking out.

But if we read carefully, that's not what happened. Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on Sunday (Palm Sunday), and the Temple Cleansing happened the next day, on Monday. But look at what Mark tells us happened on Sunday afternoon:

So Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the Temple. After looking around carefully at everything, he left because it was late in the afternoon. Then he returned to Bethany with the twelve disciples. -- Mark 11:11

Jesus didn't hulk out. He made a plan. He allowed his anger at the injustices in the Temple to fuel a cool, calculated act of civil disobedience. Friends, *this* is the good in anger. If we are wise with our anger, if we interrogate it, understand it and use it (rather than letting it control us), we can be a powerful force for justice and good. We can stand up for ourselves, for our friends and neighbors, for the most vulnerable among us.

Be angry. Don't sin.

Friends, the next several days are going to be packed with emotions. It is a *very* difficult time, and it will be no matter how the election turns out. The emotions we're all feeling and going to feel aren't *bad*. They can be confusing, mixed, strong, even overwhelming. But God created us to feel them.

So as a Church, let's commit to feel them together. To take our anger captive, to interrogate it and let it motivate us toward greater righteousness.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] Jesus invites us all to the table.

1. Asdf
2. Asdf
3. Asdf
4. Asd

Assignment + Blessing

Anger Examen