

Extreme Spiritual Makeover:
“From Anger to Courage”
Mark 11:1-11

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Last Tuesday morning on I-65 here in Williamson County, a mild-mannered, easy-going, Christian man, flew into a fit of road rage. The episode sent another driver to Vanderbilt Hospital in critical condition. The incident got the father of three arrested and put in jail and tied up rush hour traffic for more than two hours.

Anger – rage, wrath, hostility, hate – it’s never very far away from any of us. You can find a 100,000 books and articles at Amazon.com to help you deal with it. The Bible is full of it and no one can walk the road to Calvary without facing it. So, we complete this series of sermons on Extreme Spiritual Makeovers by confronting the most deadly of the deadly sins – Anger.

THE AUTHORITIES ARE ANGRY

It is anger that eliminates the opposition. *“Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest...and plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him”* (Matthew 26:3).

Anger lurks in places of power. It turns to rage when power is threatened. It plots destruction. It finds sly ways to extinguish the opposition. After all of these years, there is still a question about the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. Was it the act of a single man or the plot of powers-that-be that eliminated this modern-day prophet?

What do you do with a man who says, “We will match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering? We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws, but be assured we shall one day win our freedom.” Carefully planned government leaks called him a communist. Investigations revealed the flaws of his moral character. When that is not enough, what then?

Dr. Jerry Deffenbacher, Professor of Psychiatry at Colorado State University says, “The underlying message of highly angry people is that things ought to go my way.” Angry people tend to think that they are morally right, that any blocking or changing of their plans is an unbearable indignity, and they should not have to suffer that way. That is why the seven last words of a dying church are often, “We’ve never done it that way before.” That is why denominations sell their souls to preserving the status quo at the expense of creative ministry. That is why Jesus with his lax attitude about the Sabbath, and bold claim to be the Son of God, and tendency to hang around with sinners got him crucified. “That’s not the way we do things around here.” *“So they sought some sly way to kill him.”*

THE CROWD IS ANGRY

It's anger that spreads like wild fire. Those who crown Him King on Palm Sunday are persuaded to crucify Him on Friday. Echoes of their chant can still be heard these centuries later: "*Crucify him! Crucify him!*"

I got my education in the 60's and early 70's. I owe my soul to the Psychology of Religion. In my early days, I wanted to be a pastoral counselor, in the earnest hope that by helping others, I might find some healing for myself. In those days, we were taught to "let it all hang out." We were encouraged to express ourselves, to sing about the Age of Aquarius and blame our parents for all of our hang-ups.

In sensitivity groups, I learned that anger, which was punished in my family, was a God-given emotion that needed to be expressed. So, I went on an expression binge. I vented for twenty years, causing my family, my congregations, my superiors considerable pain. It felt good. It did a lot of harm.

Proverbs 29:11 says, "*A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.*" Vented anger makes sports events places of danger. Vented anger divides a nation into camps of left and right, red and blue, liberal and conservative.

Current psychological theory says, "Even though it might give some immediate satisfaction, venting anger – yelling, gesturing, and breaking things, does nothing to dispel anger. It actually pumps up your emotional arousal and may even prolong it. 'Letting it rip' is a dangerous myth which actually escalates the problem and hurts all involved." Maybe it is time for talk show hosts to take responsibility for their actions.

THE DISCIPLES ARE ANGRY

They run and hide. "*Then all the disciples deserted him and fled*" (Matthew 26:56). Do spacial solutions really work?

A couple was celebrating their golden wedding anniversary when the husband announced that for 50 years the two of them had never had a fight. Amazed and intrigued, a guest approached the old gentlemen and asked the secret to the couple's compatibility. "Simple," said the husband. "When we were first married, we made an agreement that whenever things got tense between us, I would take a walk, which probably explains why I have led a largely outdoor life." A little space can help from time to time, but permanent distance is hardly a formula for meaningful relationships.

Some of us are masters at avoiding conflict, but we need to remember that every dis-engagement requires a re-engagement at an appropriate time. We will not solve our problems by running from them.

Must Jesus bear the Cross alone, while all the world goes free? No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me. When Peter could not fight, he fled – his running led him to denial. When Judas lost control, he betrayed his Lord. His

guilt resulted in suicide. When the going got tough, the disciples got going and John alone could be found at the Cross. Where were Jesus' friends when he needed them the most? They were running, hiding, resenting, and hurting. Anger can do that to us. "I just don't want to get involved." "It's not my problem." We wind up hurting the ones we love.

JESUS IS ANGRY

His anger transforms. I find it interesting that the last two things Jesus does in his ministry on earth are curse a fig tree for having no fruit and cleanse the temple that had become too cluttered for prayer. Yes, Jesus knew how to be angry. We call His anger "righteous anger." When He saw a wrong, He tried to right it. When He encountered a pain, He tried to heal it. When hope was lost, He tried to restore it. What bothered Him most, got under His skin the worst, was the misunderstanding of His own. He came to his own, but His own received Him not. That was too much.

So, He storms into the temple, overturns the tables, takes a whip and drives out the money changers, and exclaims to the leaders, "*You have turned my house of prayer into a den of thieves.*" If Jesus came to our church for just a day or two, If he came for just a visit, I wonder what he'd do?

Jesus said, "*I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes.*" There is anger that redeems.

So, Jesus takes his anger, his disappointment, and his pain, and hangs it there on the Cross. There He says, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" There He says, "*Father into your hands, I commend my spirit.*" By the courage of the Cross, the hurt, the anger, the disappointment, the misunderstanding, the abandonment, is redeemed. Is that not the place for our anger, too, at the Cross?

At the Cross:

- Our hurts are healed.
- Our resentments are transformed.
- Our rage is replaced by love.
- Our hostility is lost in His Amazing Grace.

This Holy Week, would you dare to bring your anger to the Cross and have it transformed into courage?