



7th Sunday after Epiphany
February 24, 2019
Luke 6:27-38

“Free from Anger”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus, dear friends in Christ, has this happened to you? You're driving your car and all of a sudden you hear a strange ding coming from somewhere in the car. You look down and there on the dash is one of those dreaded check engine lights indicating that something is not working correctly, something is out of sync, something is failing in your engine. So, what do you do? Well, there's a number of things you could do. You could keep driving your car and ignore it and pretend that it wasn't there. You could find a piece of black tape – my sister actually did this with one of the cars that she owned – and put it over the light so that you don't have to look at it. You could find the fuse or the wire that controls the light and disconnect it. All of those things might have a way of dealing with the light, but none of them really get to the heart of the problem. In fact, in some cases, if you keep driving a car when the check engine light is on, you can end up doing some serious damage to the engine. There's another option of dealing with that check engine light. You could take it to a mechanic and have them hook it up to a computer and he could explain to you what the problem with the engine is and fix the problem so that the light turns off.

Well, in a way, anger is kind of like that check engine light. It can come on suddenly, out of the blue, when you don't expect it and there's always a deeper problem, a reason lying underneath that emotion of anger. There may be all sorts of ways to try and deal with that anger by covering it up, bottling it up inside, masking it with a cold shoulder or silent treatment, ignoring it. But if anger isn't dealt with, it can cause serious damage to our own lives and the lives of other people. It can devastate some of the most important things in our lives like our careers, our jobs, our families, our marriage, and, yes, even our faith.

The sin of anger is something that really infects all of us. I've watched as my young children when they are babies can get angry. If mom sets the child down when he or she doesn't want, they know how to scream and be upset. My other children know how to get angry when their toy is taken. Even adults know anger well. Road rage is a common problem. When people mistreat us, when we get a raw deal, when there's injustice, all of that can cause anger. Now, not all anger is a sin. Jesus Himself was angry. In His anger he drove the money changers out of the temple. There is something called righteous anger. Righteous anger, however, is only present when God's honor is at stake. We may have righteous anger against sin, against wickedness, against evil, against false teaching that twists God's Word. But the truth is, each of us is far more likely to be tempted to unrighteous anger than righteous anger. And although we may become angry at our situation, at our circumstance in life, at our job, or whatever, what about anger toward other people? What does God tell us?

That's where Jesus' words have a way of striking us right between the eyes. Why? Because it's totally foreign to our nature. Our sinful nature would never dream of doing what Jesus tells us here. Our natural reaction is to hate our enemies and to do harm to those who hate us, but Jesus says to do the very opposite: love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. It would be natural to return evil words with evil words, but Jesus says the opposite: bless them and pray for them. We might think ok, ok, that's fine and good as long as they aren't physically doing anything to me. Our natural reaction to someone hitting us would be to hit back, but Jesus says to turn the other cheek and if someone takes our coat, to give him our shirt as well, and if someone takes something from us we shouldn't demand it back.

But wait a minute, we might think. This is crazy?? Right? Is Jesus telling us to just let people walk all over us? What is Jesus' point? Well, God wants us to see Him has the One who remains in control no matter. If revenge is needed, if pay back is needed, God will make sure that it's taken care of. As far as it is for us, though, He wants us to repay evil with good so that those who mistreat us will be ashamed and in that way defeat evil by doing what is good. Letting someone hit us

again is better than filling our hearts with anger and resentment that lashes out and wants to get even. Letting someone take our coat and our shirt would be better than to let our hearts be filled with anger and resentment that wants to get even. Finally, this is Jesus' point: It is better to suffer in body and in property to every extent than to have our souls taken over by anger and bitterness.

But what if, for instance, a burglar woke me up in the middle of the night banging on the front door insisting to come into my house so that he could take whatever he wants from me. Is God saying let him do it? Actually, it would be loving for me to call the police and have the man arrested. You see, true love looks for the best interest of everyone. Helping someone in their sin or remain in their sin is not loving. If someone in my life perpetually abused me and felt no remorse, it would be loving for me to point out the error and separate from that person for a time perhaps even to break the relationship.

Interestingly, the word Jesus uses here is not to like someone like a friend, rather it is to love, to love the unlovable and seek the best interest of the person loved. It would not be in a person's best interest to continue in unrepentant sin. Loving my enemies or loving those who hurt me also means that I don't get angry with them and look for a way to get even or get back at them in order to see them suffer. True love means that I care so deeply about other people that I sincerely want what is best for them no matter who they are and ultimately that means faith and eternal salvation.

That's the true essence of what Jesus said: **"Do to others as you would have them do to you."** Finally, every Christian is foremost concerned about his or her soul and wants others to help, aid, and support them spiritually. True love would then move me not to allow someone to stay in their unrepentant sin and yet at the same time true love would move me to respond not in anger and rage, but in kindness and forgiveness no matter what someone does to me. Think about it, how much anger would I cling to and harbor if my number one concern with everyone I meet is their eternal welfare? How much would I fly off the handle, become enraged, yell, scream, when I'm foremost concerned about someone else's eternal soul? But how often isn't our concern not so much with the eternal welfare of others, but our own wants and desires?

So, is what Jesus tells us even possible? Is it possible to love your enemies? Is it possible to not get angry? Finally, as a Christian I can let things go, I'm free from anger, because I can forgive. Why? Because I know how much I myself have been forgiven. God had every right to inflict every single ounce of His eternal wrath against you and me. God had every right to be angry with us. God's anger against us would be totally justified. God is the owner and Creator of the universe, whatever He decides goes, whatever He says is right and proper. So, if God had decided to be angry with you and me forever for being sinful, He would have been totally justified.

But that's not who our God is. God isn't like that. Instead of directing His righteous wrath against you and me for our petty little problems and our petty little squabbles, He directed all His wrath against His own Son. Jesus became the lightning rod for all of God's righteous anger against sin. On that very cross God turned this sinful world upside down with His love. He shook everything up. He broke the rule of reciprocity. The rule of reciprocity that otherwise would dominate our lives says, *"Whoever does bad to you do bad to them and whoever does good to you do good to them."* God blew that up on the cross. He inflicted punishment on the only one who ever did Him right and He showered love on all of us who've time and time again done Him wrong! He punished Jesus for our sins so that He could shower His mercy, love, and grace on you and me! There He rescued you, there He freed you from anger, there He forgave all your sins, there He made you His own child and heir of eternal life!

Knowing that, seeing that, realizing that, appreciating that makes all the difference for our lives. Knowing God's love means we can be loving – even to those who hurt us, even in circumstances that are unpleasant, even when things don't work out the way we wanted, even when people disappoint us. Knowing God's love means we can turn anger down and be loving and gentle instead.

Warning lights in our cars serve a purpose- they warn us of deeper more serious problems. Temptations to become angry come at us all the time and will continue to come, but perhaps they can serve as a warning to us. Next time you're tempted to be angry be reminded of your deeper problem beneath it all: your sin. But then remember what God has done with all your sins: forgiven them. Then you can see this life for what it really is: not all that important, but temporary, fleeting, passing. You can see people in your life, even people who antagonize you, as who they really are: souls bought by the blood of Christ who need to see their sin and their Savior. Then you can let it go, live freely, free of anger, free of bitterness, and free of resentment, and free to smile and let it go, free to forgive, free to love, and free to be kind and gentle to all. Amen.