



FIRST PREZ HONOLULU
SERMON TEXT

“Anger”

(TOGETHER Sermon Series) by Timmy Fearer

Sunday, April 7, 2024

In January, Jesus decided to give us a dose of reality and he began with words like these: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Incredible news, just counter to everything we hear constantly out of our devices, our neighbors. It's the beautiful, it's the affluent, it's the rich and the privileged – they're the ones who are blessed. Jesus says, “Actually, no.” They're not excluded, but it's the poor in spirit. Those are the ones who get the kingdom and only them. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. He builds this story of a transformed life, a person who comes to God – just honest with God and honest with themselves about the state of their life, their need – and that person is transformed through those eight Beatitudes into a force to be reckoned with that is so threatening to the world system that the world has to persecute that person. Jesus began laying this foundation, reality.

Then after that, Jesus addressed the question of identity. Once you become a Beatitude person, you're the salt of the earth, you're the light of the world, you are his social influencers, just to put it in modern terms.

Then three weeks ago, Jesus said, “Let's talk about authority.” He said, “Don't think that I've come to abolish the law and the prophets. I've not come to

abolish them, but to fulfill them. And if you break one of the least of these commandments [that's the commandments he's going to start teaching this morning] and teach others to do the same, you're going to be called least in the kingdom. But if you do them and you teach them, you're going to be called great in the kingdom.” Which do you want?

So reality, identity, authority.

Now this morning, Jesus introduces us into the topic of community, true community, together in community, and thus the title of our sermon series, “Together,” which will span eight weeks. There is a new booklet available for you. We're going to get into it with Jesus as he gets into it with us.

He begins this morning, teaching on select commandments from the 10 Commandments and other portions of the Old Testament (that is, the first half of the Bible, the Hebrew Bible, which is the Bible he had). It's all about how to be together, how to stay together, and how to thrive together as a people, as a family. So, let's get into it.

Matthew 5:21-22

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.

This is Jesus on anger and where it leads and, honestly, I'm already a bit singed by that last line. All that is enough to drive you back to the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, that first

Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Jesus' words on anger will make you poor in spirit if nothing else does. And that's good, remember, because that's a blessed position to be in. That's a position to have God begin to work on you and in you and then with you and through you as a change agent, as his social influencer in this hurting world of ours.

So, keep that in mind. Keep in mind that all this is said for your good and my good, our transformation, surrounded by this frame of the mercy of God and the grace of God poured out upon your life, which is that foundation Jesus has been building for the last three months. Keep also in mind that these words reveal what sort of attitude of the heart and behavior in life Jesus envisions for his people. This is his vision for you, inner attitude and outer actions.

So, let's get back into it. We'll just unpack these two verses. In verse 21, Jesus says, "You've heard that it was said to our ancestors...." Basically, that is Moses and that generation coming out of bondage in Egypt. They're wandering around in the wilderness. They are at the foot of Mount Sinai. The law comes. Moses delivers it to this greatest generation, you could say. "You've heard that it was said to our ancestors, 'You shall not kill a man.'" That is commandment number six of the big 10. You can find that in Exodus 20:13. Moses is not talking about killing in war. He's talking about killing your neighbor. You shall not murder. That's the commandment.

So, Jesus quotes the commandment, and then he summarizes the result of violating the commandment, "Whoever murders will be judged." That's the consequence of murders,

judgment – Exodus 21:12. You're going to be brought before a local court, tried, convicted, sentenced. And that's still true today, around the world, wherever societies operate according to the rule of law.

Now Jesus offers his own statement, his own commentary on His own authority, and he says something quite radical. What he says is not contradicting or undermining the Old Testament law, this law of Moses. It's consistent with the law, but it's clearly surpassing the commandments, fulfilling the commandment – as he said, "That's what I'm all about, to fulfill – and he's reaching deeper into it. He's going down underneath it. He says, "You've heard that it was said, 'You shall not kill a man.' Anyone who does that is going to court. But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or a sister, you ought to be going to court." You.

Now, that's shocking, if you think about it, and it must have been *really* shocking to the original hearers as they were there on the side of that mountain listening to Jesus. It's as if I were to stand here and say to you, "People who shoot innocent others, including children, they should go to jail for a long time. And so should you go to jail for a long time, if you're angry with the person sitting next to you?" According to Jesus and His teaching, your anger is that serious. It's that dangerous. It's that deadly. Jesus is going right to the heart of the problem with murder. He's saying murder begins in the human heart with anger there. Murderer is not the problem. Anger is the problem.

Now, anger itself is not necessarily bad. We saw that on Palm Sunday when Jesus comes in and starts breaking furniture in the precincts of the temple, he's so angry. The Prophets got angry.

Moses got angry. The Apostle Paul got angry. In fact, at one point, he says, “Be angry, but do not sin.” He says, “Don't let the sun go down on your anger.”

Jesus is talking about that kind of anger here in the teaching. The Greek text says literally, “If anyone among you is *being* angry,” meaning ongoing anger, fed anger, nurtured anger, carried anger. Let me ask you a question: Did you carry some anger with you into the sanctuary this morning? Are you carrying anger around with you? Jesus is talking about, as one commentator put it, “the anger of a man who nurses his wrath to keep it warm.” (There, there. I love you. Do you need some food?) Do you know what I'm talking about? Are you carrying anger with you?

That kind of anger requires a decision to carry it and to keep it growing and going. It's that decision that is deadly. It leads to ultimately acting out on your anger, verbally, physically. This kind of carried anger is not just with anyone or anything, though, in the teaching here. It's anger with a brother or a sister, and not your biological family, although Jesus is very concerned about anger there, and he wants to help you deal with that. But here, Jesus is talking about anger within the church family. Unresolved, carried anger is death for a church. It's murder. You may have smiles and handshakes. You may have hugs and kisses. “Oh, how are you?” But if anger is there under the surface, it's all just a show. It's a false front, a facade. It's hollow. Carried anger leaves no room for genuine love, for true Christian Fellowship. Carried anger is death for a church.

Jesus is not stupid. He knows that the quality of our relationships, the quality of our fellowship, has

direct bearing on the effectiveness of our ministry and the credibility of our message. That's why Jesus picks up this commandment first. Of all the things he could start talking about, this is the very first thing that he decides to talk about because it's the most important. If you don't get anger dealt with, you can forget about everything else because it kills our ministry, it kills our message, it undermines everything.

Let me tell you about Jackie and Doug. Doug was a Presbyterian pastor in Southern California. Ultimately, he and his wife, Jackie, were up in Wine Country, up north of San Francisco, a nice place. They were in kind of a cushy job, and a cushy spot in this little, cute church. And they were kind of bored. They were looking around for something and Doug learned about World Vision, that world-wide relief agency that does a lot of social work around the world. Doug said, “What do you think about maybe going with World Vision for a year?” And Jackie said, “No way!” Well, finally, they wind up being invited to go to a refugee camp in Ethiopia – this is the 1980s, during one of the famines during that decade in Ethiopia – to serve as pastors to a team of doctors and health workers and camp personnel. They decided to do it for a year.

They arrived and they found two things. 1) The camp leadership team, that was made up of Christians – the larger group were health professionals of all faiths, but that leadership team were Christians – was on the verge of collapse because they were at odds with each other. There was deep, unresolved anger. They were not communicating. The feeding and the serving of the refugees was suffering because of it.

2) Equally tragic, this had to do with a member of the larger team, a Buddhist physician who was from Southeast Asia, part of the team serving the refugees. Jackie got to know her and got into a conversation with her at one point. Probing, she said, "What are your thoughts and feelings about Christianity?" The doctor said, "I'm not convinced Christianity is true." Jackie said, "Well, why?" And the physician said, without a pause, "Just because of the conflict amongst the Christians on the team."

How many times has that story been repeated? We say to our neighbors, "Hey, Jesus can change your life," but the neighbors want to know if he's changed ours. How are we treating each other?

Jesus is not done yet. He keeps going here. He says it doesn't take very long for anger to slip out of the mouth, with insults, with criticisms, with hurtful words, with accusations. He says, "And if you insult a brother or a sister, you'll be liable to the council. If you say, 'You fool,' you'll be liable to you-know-what-and-where."

We have a saying: sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me. Really? That is a lie. Words can crush you. Words can cripple you. One of the commentators I was reading as I was preparing the message said, "There are many people in mental health hospitals today because of a hurtful word that's lodged in their soul, like a bullet in their spine."

Jesus says insulting a brother or a sister is like that and it'll not only get you judgment, but you're going to get sent to the council. That's what he said. What's the council? He's talking about the ancient Jewish Supreme Court. Now, as he gives this teaching, is he saying, "I'm going to send you to

the Jewish Supreme Court if you start talking bad, talking smack about each other"? No, he's exaggerating to make the point, to get our attention, to get their attention. By the way, Jesus is going to do a lot of exaggerating in the Sermon on the Mount because we need our attention got a lot.

Then he says, "If you start calling each other fools...." That's even worse because in the ancient world, the biblical world, when you call somebody a fool in the Bible, it is to morally condemn them. It's to say, "You're an obstinate, rebellious, godless rebel. You don't belong in the kingdom of God." Jesus says, "Hey, if you start saying that, consigning people to the other place, you're going to wind up in the other place yourself." Is he exaggerating again?

All right, let me make a confession by just asking a question. Are you struggling with anger or am I the only one? I was sitting in my study Thursday morning, getting ready for the message, and I realized I am carrying anger towards a pastor friend of mine. I need to make that right. I need to deal with that. (It's not with Pastor Tim Shaw. It's with somebody over in California where I'm from.) You know, I can be so judgmental. I used to have a real problem with carried anger and it would slip out of my mouth with insults, gossip, sarcasm. Let me tell you something: sarcasm is always angry – verbal jabs, condemnation.

I want to tell you something as a testimony. God has done a great healing work in my life but, like you, I'm a work in progress. All of us are. I carried a lot of anger against my own father for many years. Many of his actions and words hurt me when I was a kid. My sinful response to that hurts. Let me repeat that: my *sinful* response. Remember, in

January, we talked about these three questions. 1) What happened? 2) How did it hurt me? Those are important questions to ask and answer just to get in touch with the stuff God wants to deal with in your life. And our society loves those two questions because we all want to just stay right there. “You did something. Here's how it hurt me.” And then we're ready to start accusing and condemning and say, “Justice for you. Cancel you.” But we don't want to ask and answer that important third question of 3) What was my sinful response against you?

My sinful response was to carry my anger against my dad and to condemn him. I'll tell you, I did that and I was good at it. Then, about 35 years ago, when I was a young adult, I realized – and it wasn't just me that realized it; the Lord was opening my heart and mind up to it – that my anger was eating me up inside and it was affecting all of my adult relationships and preventing me from moving forward with Jesus Christ in my life and growing up, that my anger would destroy me if I did not get rid of it. So, I got rid of it, in relation to my dad. I think, in fairness, I should say Jesus got rid of it. Maybe, more accurately even, we got rid of it together.

I'm going to tell you that story, but not today. I'm gonna tell you that story in two weeks, because it belongs two weeks from now, as Jesus helps us work through our anger that we have in our life. I've told you this much because some of you are carrying a lot of anger with you that may be decades old against one or both of your parents. Jesus can help you with that. In the 10 Commandments, there are the first four. They deal with the vertical relationship with God. Then there are the final six, the horizontal relationship. Do you know what is the first at the top of that second list?

Honor your father and mother, because your relationship with them is going to affect adultery, murder, stealing, lying, coveting. You have got to get that worked out. Jesus can help you with that.

Some of you are carrying anger against your spouse, or against your ex spouse, or your children. Jesus can help you with that, too, and he wants to.

Back to the focus of Jesus' words: some of you are carrying anger against people in our church right now, or with people who used to be in this church, or with people who were in the church that you used to be in and you left there because you were angry, and you came here, but you brought your anger with you. Some of you might be getting angry with me right now, because I'm bringing all this up.

When you're a pastor – and I would say when you're a leader of any kind – people do get angry with you. They get angry with you because they have many expectations of you and for you. Expectations is a very important word when we're talking about anger. People think you should do this, or do that, stay here, go there, all according to their expectations. And when you don't do this and say that, stay here, go there, when you don't live up to their expectations, they get mad at you. For example, have you ever been angry with any of the leaders here at this church in the last five years because they didn't do what you thought they should, or they did something or said something or thought something that you thought they shouldn't, something that was contrary to your expectations? Just set aside for a minute whether you are right or wrong in your expectations, but has this happened? Have you ever been angry with any

of the worship leaders up on the platform here? Or angry with an elder or with a deacon? Or any of the people in your row? Or maybe with the people who are on the other side of the sanctuary? And the reason they are on the other side of the sanctuary from you is because you're mad at them because they didn't live up to your expectations. Have you ever been angry with God because he didn't live up to your expectations?

Listen to this: anger is always the result of unmet expectations. Always. Something you want, something you expect, you're not getting it, and so, when it comes to your anger, is the problem with the other person? Maybe. Or is the problem with you and your expectations? I think, more often than not, the problem is with us and our expectations, as opposed to the other person, but we really don't want to face that. We want to nurse that anger, keep it warm.

If you're not sure what your expectations are, just identify the things you're angry about on a regular basis. Trace that anger back to a disappointment and then trace the disappointment back to the expectation. You'll get in touch with your expectations that way.

Jesus is saying, "If you claim to have faith in me, if you claim to be one of mine, if you really want to be with me, and walk beside me, and be a part of what I'm doing, and do the things that I'm doing, if that's what you want, before anything else, you must let go of your anger. You must get rid of it towards one another.

The Apostle Paul said this to the Christians at ancient Colossi, in his letter to them.

Colossians 3:8

But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.

This is not "This would be a nice idea if you would do this, please." It's a command.

We've talked about Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the past. He's the German pastor who was hanged by the Nazis when he was 39, six weeks before the American troops liberated the prison camp he was in in the spring of 1945.



This is a picture of him when he was 29 or 30 years old. He was running an underground Seminary in Germany when the Nazis were in control. He's the one who coined the term "cheap grace," where people say, "Yeah, I'm a Christian," as they breeze in and out of church. Or they don't go to church. "Yeah, I'm fine with God. Yeah, everything's cool." It didn't cost them anything.

This is what Bonhoeffer said about anger as he was commenting on this part of the Sermon on the Mount. "Anger is always an attack on the brother's [or sister's] life. Every angry word betrays our bond. It shows lack of respect. It places ourself over the other. Every angry word is a blow struck at our brother. It is a stab at his heart. It seeks to hit, hurt

and destroy.” He continues, “A deliberate insult is even worse. We are openly disgracing our brother in the eyes of the world and causing others to despise him. We are murdering his character. “Do not murder” is not enough to keep us together. What is needed is taking responsibility for the care and welfare of our brother and our sister. Anger is the enemy of that.”

Some of you know who Dallas Willard was.



He taught at USC for many years, was a great Christian, and a philosopher. He wrote a book on the Sermon on the Mount called *The Divine Conspiracy*.

This is what he wrote: “Anger is not wrong, but immediately it pushes us towards interfering with and possibly even harming those who have thwarted our will and interfered with our life, not lived up to expectations, which is the source of our anger. Anger, by itself, already wounds the other. Anger feeds on anger and wants to interfere with the other. Most people carry around with them a supply of anger. We indulge and feed it. Anger always has an element of self righteousness and vanity in it. Find a person with embraced anger and you will find a person with a wounded ego. And that wound, blown out of proportion, leads to anything from a slow burning resentment to a holy

crusade to inflict harm on the one who has thwarted me or my wishes or bruised my sense of propriety. Anger and contempt are twins. They stay close together. Jesus sees the elimination of anger and contempt as the first and fundamental step towards rightness in the kingdom heart. Anger is the opposite of mercy. Nurtured, indulged anger, even without being acted out, is poison to the carrier and the world around him or her. It seizes upon the body and the surrounding environment just by being there. It takes hold of and marshals our mind and emotions to tend and feed it. We constantly remind ourselves of how we've been treated, and how wrong it was, and that something must be done. It is not possible for people with such attitudes and actions to live in the movement of God's kingdom, for they are totally out of harmony with it.”

Let me say this, at this point. If you have been abused violently, physically, sexually, verbally, that's a real injustice and it is right to feel and be angry and to seek justice, to stop the harm. But even then, ultimately, the goal is to break free of and release your anger, otherwise it's going to eat you up.

Here's Bonhoeffer again: “In anger and contempt, we forfeit our relationship with God. They [that is, anger and contempt] get in the way. Our worship is unreal, hypocritical. If our hearts are full of contempt, and we are unreconciled, we are not worshiping God. We are worshiping something else that justifies our anger and ourselves. We're not worshiping the God of love your brother, love your neighbor, love your enemy and pray for him.”

James, the half-brother of the Lord, in his letter, writes this.

James 1:19-20

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:31-32

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

So, it's the first Sunday of the month and we were scheduled to celebrate the Lord's Supper today. But after hearing Jesus' words, if we're honest with ourselves, we're not ready for that. Yes, the Lord's Supper is, as we said a few weeks ago, God's oath of allegiance to us saying, "I'm committed to you, my people. You're still in the family." But as we participate in that table, we are saying in response, "Yes, Lord, and all this right between me and other church family members." But when all is *not* right between me and other church family members – in as much as I have some control over that – and then I go ahead and participate in the sacrament and the table without any kind of preparation or reflection or repentance, any attempt to make things right, if I just get up and kind of breeze through that thing like it's some empty ritual, go through the motions, we make a mockery of that table. And then we're just playing church. We're not really *being* the church. As an old pastor said to me many years ago, "There's nothing more dangerous than the casual handling of holy things." Read First Corinthians chapter 11. Paul has a word or two to say to the Corinthians who were casually

handling the table, and it was causing all kinds of problems for them.

So, early this past week, as I was sitting getting ready, I was getting uncomfortable because I thought I'm going to be putting all of you in a very untenable position, opening up Jesus' words and then saying, "Come on." So, I talked with Pastor Tim Shaw about it. I talked with our worship elder, Bill Hicks. I talked with Chavez. In agreement, we felt we're not ready. So, we're postponing this table for two weeks. We will celebrate on the 21st of April – not today, the 7th – at which time, Jesus is going to conclude his words on anger and reconciliation (that's next week) and forgiveness (that's two weeks from now, and that's my "forgive dad" story and some other things). We have two weeks to prepare. I believe that, when it comes to two weeks from now, this is going to be maybe one of the most meaningful sacraments of the Lord's Supper that you'll ever experience because we're taking it seriously and getting ready.

That leads us to our Spiritual Steps of the Week. Here's what I want you to do this week.

1. Make a list of the people you carry anger toward.
2. Pick one person a day.
3. Trace your anger back to a disappointment and then back to an expectation you had that wasn't met. Maybe there's a whole bunch.
4. Pray, "Jesus, where did this expectation of mine come from, from you or from somewhere or someone else?"
5. Pray, "Jesus, helped me with my anger. Just open it up."

Next week, we'll talk about what to do next. You don't have to be a perfect person by two weeks from now to come to the table. You just have to begin to take the steps. Jesus is going to say, "Now, that's how my people behave. You come to the table. Let's sit down and have something to eat." Just get started.

Let me pray for us right now.

Father, you're saying some hard words to us, but like any good and loving Father, you don't hold back because you say them in great love for us. You say them through your appointed agent, your Son, Jesus, the crucified and risen One, who absorbed all of our anger into his own body and bore it away on the cross and took it to the grave and he left it there when he rose from the dead. So, thank you for doing that part of the work. We need your help now to complete the work, to be set free in this life from not righteous indignation, the proper kind of anger, but the kind of anger that we carry and nurture and that destroys our fellowship. Help us with that. We give ourselves to you and we look forward to what you're going to do in the coming days, and the stories we have to tell. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.