

Proverbs 14-20 (selected verses) / Matthew 5: 21-26

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#Anger

Social media has given the number sign a whole new meaning ~ thinking of these two sets of parallel lines which intersect in a perpendicular fashion as the symbol for number or pound is no longer the only way to use such a symbol ~ it is now called a **hashtag**. If you facebook, tweet, Instagram or blog, then you're already familiar with hashtags – it's a new twist on an old item. Because of its widespread use, *hashtag* was added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in June 2014. So, what exactly, is a hashtag used for? Well, it is a type of label used in social networks and in blogging which makes it easier for users to find messages with a specific theme or content. Users create and use hashtags by placing the hash character (or number sign) # in front of a word or unspaced phrase, either in the main text of a message or at the end. Searching for that hashtag then brings up every message that has been tagged with it.

In the same spirit, as we move through book of Proverbs, during this preaching series, if you hashtagged the word Anger, the following verses would show up in Proverbs chapters 14-20 [and to some degree Proverbs might be thought of as the original twitter for twitter prides itself on short, pithy quips which are 140 characters or less in length]:

- Proverbs 14:29 - Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly.
- Proverbs 15:1 - A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
- Proverbs 15:18 - Those who are hot-tempered stir up strife, but those who are slow to anger calm contention.
- Proverbs 16:32 - One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city.
- Proverbs 19:11 - Those with good sense are slow to anger, and it is their glory to overlook an offense.  
Proverbs 19:12 - A king's anger is like the growling of a lion, but his favor is like dew on the grass.
- Proverbs 20:2 - The dread anger of a king is like the growling of a lion; anyone who provokes him to anger forfeits life itself.

While that helps us compile the list, what we do with the list remains to be seen – especially in how these words affect the way we live our lives. Perhaps it's a bit like the hashtag taking over the number sign – old ways of seeing, being and doing that give way to a new understanding which shapes our culture – and given the fact we are gathered here today as the community of faith known as the Church, then perhaps it follows that these words might help us to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

And if we are going to follow this one we identify as Lord & Savior of our lives, then perhaps we could learn a thing or two from Jesus' words. Which brings us to our New Testament passage...Matthew 5: 21-26. **[show slides for Matthew 5:21-26]**

So, all of this now begs the question, 'what do we do with our anger?'

**[9:30]**

If you've seen Pixar's movie Inside Out – which is a great film – you're familiar with the character on the screen this morning – it is the feeling Anger – voiced by comedian Lewis Black – I appreciated the way this movie shows how our feelings interact in our minds and how they go together to help us create core memories in our lives – I also love the scene that takes place between a mother, father and daughter around the dinner table after they've recently relocated the family due to Dad's job and daughter has had a particularly stressful day on her first day in the new school – see what anger has to say...**[show clip]**

**[8:15 & 11:00]**

Do we follow the words of Presbyterian Minister and Children's Television Network star, Fred Rogers who penned the following song:

What do you do with the mad that you feel  
When you feel so mad you could bite?  
When the whole wide world seems oh, so wrong...  
And nothing you do seems very right?

What do you do? Do you punch a bag?  
Do you pound some clay or some dough?  
Do you round up friends for a game of tag?  
Or see how fast you go?

**[8:15, 9:30 & 11:00]**

What do you do with the mad that you feel?

Do you have one of these **[slide with bad call brick & darnit doll]** in your home to save your sanity or your flat screen?

The item on the left is a bad call brick sent to our son from a friend who shares a love of the Ohio State Buckeyes – which makes this Penn State alum #angry – if you can't read it, it says:

When the referee's call was made too quick  
It's time to bring out the  
BAD CALL BRICK  
Throw it at the TV set with an aim so steady...  
Now Don't You Feel Better already.

The item on the right is a Darnit Doll:

Whenever things don't go so well,  
And you want to hit the wall and yell,

Here's a little darnit doll.  
That you can't do without.  
Just grasp it firmly by the legs  
And find a place to slam it.  
And as you whack the stuffing out  
Yell, "Darnit! Darnit! Darnit!"  
My mom had one of those – she used it a lot.

How do we handle our anger?

A great anecdote I read many years ago and have failed on several occasions, goes like this:  
You can tell a lot about a man by how he handles three things:  
A rainy day...A crying child...A tangled set of Christmas lights.  
I've also seen added to this list Lost Luggage.

What do we do with the mad that we feel?

Well, Jesus has given us some thoughts on anger in our Matthew passage.  
It's important to recognize that Matthew's Jesus has done something radical – he reaffirms what the Old Testament, Judaic Law stated – in those "You have heard it said..." statements. Then he cuts to the root of the matter – in those "But I say to you..." statements.

In none of these instances is Jesus giving us new laws to follow for he's not interested in us knowing more rules, rather he's interested in us living changed lives.  
The good news for us is that while we try to live these changed lives the one who sets the bar high for us is also the one who walks alongside us and promises to struggle with us as we seek to discern and faithfully follow God.  
Matthew is hoping we'll become theologians who will look to Jesus as our guide – the one who will shape our attitudes, motives and perspective on life.

And so today, we look at anger and we begin with Jesus words, "...if you are angry with a brother or sister you will be liable to judgment; ... if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire."

First, how many of us have ever chosen to get angry?  
Most often we don't decide when we are angry we just feel angry.  
In the words of the old saying, "Feelings are neither right or wrong...they just are."  
We watch a commercial about hungry children in a remote part of the world or about animal abuse and the injustice of it all makes us angry.  
We're talking with a friend, co-worker or family member and they knowingly or unknowingly push our 'hot button' and we feel anger's energy swell inside us.

There is nothing right or wrong about anger.  
Anger after all is merely a basic alert to us that something is not right.

What we do with our anger though makes all the difference.

We watch the advertisement about hungry children or abused animals and we resign ourselves to believing there is nothing we can do about it OR we decide to make a difference by donating to relief organizations or act locally by donating to something Ruth's Harvest that sends home backpack filled with food for local children in our school district.

We lash out in anger at the person who has in our mind picked up the red-phone and declared all-out war on us by their words or actions OR we calmly talk about what has happened in the relationship to bring us to a point where the use of vitriolic hateful speech is being considered as a viable course of action.

Anger is natural.

What we do with it is up to us!

I wonder if that is why Matthew's Jesus gives us the law first then goes to the heart of the law which reminds us that merely knowing something doesn't always mean we fully understand it – however, when we live it out in relationship, then we recognize it has taken hold in our lives.

This takes foresight and planning on our part.

Just waiting until we're embroiled in a matter is too late – We have to recognize who we want to be before we can be that person.

If we don't have a plan for how we'll handle ourselves before we feel anger we run the risk of living out the chorus of Rodney Foster's song *Nobody Wins*:

Nobody wins. We both lose.

Hearts get broken & Love gets bruised.

When we light that same old fuse again and again.

It's vital that we check our thoughts & actions as we respond to anger's feeling

Is this really between me and the other person or is it between me and myself?

If the latter, then quell the urge to respond.

If the former, then let's sit and talk.

And when we sit and talk, what will be our *rules of engagement*?

So, using the fashion of Matthew's Jesus in this morning's gospel let's look at some rules this way:

1. You have heard it said, *Speak now before you forget what you're going to say.*

But I say to you, *If you speak first you might miss what the other person is saying so let's try listening to each other in an effort to understand before being understood.*

The most helpful question is the *what* question.

What has happened to cause this response?

What would be helpful for us to do in this situation?

The *what* question invites conversation – the *why* question can be misinterpreted as accusation and blame.

Why do you blank?

Why are you blank?

If you're like me, you may find yourself responding to *why* questions with defenses going up and a feeling of having to defend oneself.

On the flip side, when I'm asked a *what* question I am asked to share my feelings and am inclined to talk without protective barriers.

Asking questions avoids formulating responses before we've fully heard the other point of view. Asking questions often leads us to a place where we see the problem in a new light and find resolution and reconciliation before it becomes too intense.

Asking questions to understand sets up a dichotomy of working together rather than me versus you.

2. You have heard it said, *Keep reminding the other person of what they've done or else they'll do it again.*

But I say to you, *Let's agree to not get side-tracked with old grievances and to stay focused on the matter at hand.*

Two people were asked by another how they handled conflict.

One of them responded, "Oh, that's simple. Every time we have a disagreement he gets historical."

The interviewer asked, "Don't you mean hysterical?"

"No, I mean historical. He brings up everything I've done wrong since the day we met."

Maybe an earlier hurt needs revisited, however it's important to discern if it has a direct bearing on the discussion at hand – if not, then it needs to wait.

I've found that often when we get *historical* in a disagreement it's designed to stop conversation, wound the other and has the sole intention of winning the argument.

When our focus is solely on winning then we whittle the relationship down to who has the most power rather than what is best of the relationship.

3. You have heard it said, *Win at any cost.*

But I say to you, *Sometimes winning is really losing.*

Winning at any cost often means we speak before we think.

Two women were seated next to each other on an airplane.

Noticing the one looked flushed and embarrassed the other woman asked her what was wrong. She replied, "Oh, I am so embarrassed. I can't believe I said it to him."

She went on to explain her interaction with the man at the ticket counter.

"When I went to check in for this flight the most gorgeous looking man was behind the counter. I don't know if you saw him or not... Anyway, when I got to him and he looked up from his computer at me and asked what he could do to help me, I blurted out, 'I'd like a ticket to Hunksville Alabama.' I live in Huntsville. I could have died right there."

“Oh, that’s all right,” the other woman said, “You see I’m a psychologist and what you did was called a Freudian slip. It’s when you mean to say one thing but your mind was occupied on something else and what you were really thinking comes out.”

“For instance,” she continued, “something similar happened to me this morning over breakfast with my husband. I meant to say, ‘Honey, could you please pass the jelly for my toast.’ And what came out was, ‘Darling, you’re ruining my life.’”

Winning at any cost usually means we speak before we think.

And then we try to write it off or explain it away:

*Well, that’s just me.*

*I really didn’t mean it. I just got caught up in the heat of the moment.*

*Sometimes you just make me so mad.*

*Just kidding.*

Someone once taught me our words are like toothpaste.

It takes little effort or thought to get the toothpaste out of the tube.

Once it’s out though try getting it back in the tube.

Words can spill out of our mouths easily and without thought ~ can we retrieve them with simplistic sentiment?

We can choose to be at the very least cordial with one another – even in our disagreements – the question is, *Will we?*

I believe we can.

Because as people of faith, I believe God has given us the power through the gift of the Holy Spirit to be the people God knows we can be.

That song by Fred Rogers finishes with these words:

It’s great to be able to stop  
When you’ve planned a thing that’s wrong,  
And be able to do something else instead  
And think this song:

I can stop when I want to  
Can stop when I wish.  
I can stop, stop, stop any time.  
And what a good feeling to feel like this  
And know that the feeling is really mine.  
Know that there’s something deep inside  
That helps us become what we can.

As people of faith, we can be different than we are – we can handle anything even anger in healthy ways – because we believe in the one who promises us full life – and who promises to be with us in all aspects of life – and that one is Jesus the Christ who showed us what the power

of God can do in a life – for we believe in a God who can bring new life where once we thought only death could reside.

4. Let me close then in this way, You have heard it said *This morning's message would be a good one for my friend to hear.*

But I say to you *It's good to remember – preacher included – how a mirror works.*