**TEXT: Matthew 5:21-26 February 16, 2020**

**I COULD JUST EXPLODE!**

**Most professors of homiletics would recommend that you not start a sermon talking about professors of homiletics. Partly because you’ve got to define the word homiletics. It means the art of preaching. My professor of homiletics was Dr. Walter Cook. Beyond that most of them would suggest it’s not a very good strategy to open up your remarks with a mini-lesson in Greek. But, forgive me Dr. Cook, that’s just what I’m going to do!**

**Our passage today from Matthew is yet another section of the Sermon on the Mount. It is part of a string of teachings that take on a similar structure. In each of the teachings, Jesus begins by stating one of the laws found in the Hebrew scriptures, in this case, “Thou shall not murder.” Then he expands and broadens its meaning. “But I say to you, that if you are angry with your brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement.” And then he offers an illustration of how one should deal with this broader understanding of the law, speaking here about reconciling with one with whom you are at odds.**

**Which brings us to the Greek lesson. Reading this passage, hearing Jesus speaking out against anger, you can’t help but quake in your boots. I mean, lets be honest, who among us never gets angry? If you’ve ever had a teenager, heavens, if you’ve ever been a teenager, you’ve certainly gotten angry on occasion. And what about those in-laws?**

**Two older women are talking about their grown-up children. One of them says, “You know my son got married six months ago and I’ve still not visited him and his new wife.”**

**“You haven’t,” says her friend, “that’s shocking!”**

**“Well,” says the first woman, “I’m waiting until they have their first baby.”**

**“Why’s that?”**

**“Well, everybody knows folks are a lot happier seeing a Grandma show up than a mother-in-law!”**

**Yes, we all get angry now and then. Some of us more than others. So, these words of Jesus seem like an impossible challenge, for it feels like he’s saying, get angry and you are doomed! But understand this, there are two words for anger in Greek. The first is *thumos. Thumos* is that angry feeling that suddenly flares up, like when you are cut off in traffic and it raises your ire. Anger flares up suddenly, and then usually just disappears. That’s not the type of anger Jesus is talking about. You are going to get angry now and then. It’s only human. It’s not a sin to have an angry feeling. The issue, rather, is what you do with the anger.**

**Which brings us to the second Greek word, the one Jesus uses in this passage, *orge*. *Orge* is anger that goes deep, anger that is held tightly. As William Barclay writes, “it is the anger of those who nurse their wrath to keep it warm; it is the anger over which people brood . . . .” (*Daily Study Bible, Matthew I*: 160) *Orge* is the anger that leads to bitterness and resentment. Jesus isn’t saying if you have a flash of anger you’re liable to judgement, he’s saying if you hold on to anger, if you fail to deal with it in a reconciling manner, you are indeed subject to judgement.**

**It is important to remember that anger can be a useful emotion; it can point to something that is wrong or out of kilter. It can warn us of danger. It can help us understand when personal boundaries have been crossed. But when it is allowed to fester, it can poison the very soul.**

**When someone lives with an alcoholic they too are caught up in the disease of alcoholism. It is often called the family disease. When an alcoholic is actively drinking, he or she can engage in some infuriating behaviors. Missed appointments, jobs lost, health impaired, and the list goes on. For a parent, a child or a spouse of an alcoholic, it is very easy to be increasingly angry, to grow bitter and resentful. But that always proves to be destructive.**

**Al-Anon is a Twelve Step program that helps family members and friends of alcoholics cope with the impact of alcoholism on their lives. Over the years Al-Anon has developed a great deal of literature designed to encourage family members as they learn how to deal with the disease of alcoholism. One of the oldest Al-Anon books is called *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*. It is a daily reader--with a short meditation for each day of the year. The reading for August 22 deals with the issue of anger. “If a sharp thorn or splinter pierces my hand,” it asks, “what do I do? I remove it as quickly as I can. Surely, I wouldn’t leave it there, hurting me, until it festered and sent its infection throughout my body. Yet what do I do with the thorns of resentment and hatred when they pierce my thoughts?” What indeed? How does one deal with the anger that festers?**

**If you are on your way to make a sacrifice at the Temple’s altar, says Jesus, and suddenly remember you are angry with your brother or sister, first go to them and be reconciled. If you are on your way to church, and you’ve got your offering envelope all set to drop in the plate when it passes by you, and you suddenly remember you’re ticked off with your neighbor and harboring a grudge, first go and find that person and set things right. Then make your offering. Of course, we already took up the collection--but I trust you get the point. You can’t be right with God unless you are right with your neighbor. And if you are all caught up in anger and resentment being right with your neighbor is nigh unto impossible.**

**And why? Because untamed anger can destroy a relationship. It can be as devastating as murder itself. Most of us would never even consider murdering someone. Most of us wouldn’t think of breaking the commandment “Thou shall not kill.” Most of us would never take up a gun or a knife and do some one in. But our anger can be just a lethal in a relationship. We might never take a human life, but we very well might risk killing a relationship. Don’t allow anger to linger, says Jesus, be reconciled.**

**Certainly, we all have cause at one time or another to experience real anger. It might be anger due to the behaviors of an individual. A spouse who cheats on you. A child who constantly lies. A friend who gossips about you behind your back. A boss who makes you work overtime with no pay. Be reconciled, says Jesus. Don’t sputter and fume, go and directly confront the issue. Consider solutions. Do what you can, and then, if necessary, “let go, and let God.” It may be that you can’t reconcile, that the other party is just not willing to reach any sort of compromise. But you will have cleaned your side of the street. You will have done what you can to resolve the problem.**

**We can also be angry with society itself, that we can carry resentments towards institutions. That too can fester and churn until it reaches a boiling point. That too can explode! We see that kind of anger all around us these days. Tweets and Facebook messages and Instagram posts just boiling over with hateful language, cruel words and bottled-up rage. And it is taking a toll on the body politic. It is so tempting to fight back with equally vicious attacks. So tempting to lash out at the other--no matter who the other may be! But that’s not the way, says Jesus, you must work towards reconciliation. You must seek solutions that work for everybody. You must reach out with forgiveness and love.**

**Martin Luther King recognized the wisdom of Jesus’ way of dealing with anger and resentment. And he certainly had cause to be angry. He had been threatened, verbally and physically attacked. He had endured segregation and racism. And he had been told over and over again, give it time. But King refused to lash out. “To meet hate with retaliatory hate would do nothing,” he famously wrote, “[it would do nothing] but intensify the existence of evil in the world.” (*A Testament of Hope*, 16) That said, though, he didn’t ignore the anger, he didn’t ignore those things which angered him and so many others. Instead, he confronted the problems head on with *agape*. That’s another one of those Greek words. It means love. Love, as King wrote, that seeks “to preserve and create community.” (Ibid) Love that works for reconciliation between individuals, between religions, between rich and poor, between black and brown and white, between all those at odds.**

**Back in 1963, Dr. King wrote his famous *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, a response to those white pastors who urged him to set aside his activism and be patient, to simply allow the process to play itself out. In time, they said, the issues would be resolved that divided Americans. But King knew that would only lead to further problems, further complications, further divisions. “I hope,” he wrote, “the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour.” (Ibid, 300)**

**Friends, that was fifty-seven years ago! Fifty-seven years! Yes, there have been great strides made--laws passed and enforced, rights granted. All because love was brought to bear. *Agape* love. But there are forces afoot that would undo some of those rights and protections for many Americans. And other matters that still need to be resolved, other divisions that need to be overcome. I imagine, if Dr. King was standing right here today, he’d say the exact same thing. “I hope the church as a whole,” he might say yet again, “will meet the challenge of this decisive hour.” The question is not is there a challenge before us, the question--as is often the case--is how we the church, the church here, the church in Fort Myers, the Church Universal, how will we respond? Will we allow the anger to continue to fester, or will we meet it head on with the reconciling love of God?**

**Amen**

**John H. Danner**