

Anger and Sin

There is a tendency for us to believe that, as Christians, we should never get angry. Yet this is not what Jesus, on whom we attempt to pattern our lives, modeled. Jesus got mad at the Pharisees and the Scribes. He called them a brood of snakes, among other things. And He certainly got angry with the money changers in the Temple, when He drove them out with a whip. Further, the Bible certainly does not say not to get angry. Instead, it tells us what to do WHEN we are angry. Ephesians 4:26 says “If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin.” In other words, it’s not the GETTING angry that is a sin, it is what you DO when you are angry. But, James 1:19-20 tells us to “be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God.

Anger is not the same as hatred. Our Lord brought the commandment to LOVE one another. Therefore it is never right to hate someone. Whether we like someone or not, we are told to love them. This is easy to see in most families when, at one time or another, everyone does not get along with someone. Yet they still love them. We may be angry with someone. We may have a hard time getting along with someone. But we must never HATE anyone.

While anger itself is not a sin, the results of “getting angry” can often cause many problems. Too often, when we are angry, we stop listening to the other person. We become so focused on how “right” we are that we stop listening to anything that might indicate that we are wrong. We are not interested in coming to a right or just conclusion; all that matters is winning the argument. Another problem with acting out our anger is that we say and do things that we do not mean and often regret later. Yet another problem with the results of anger is that, too often, it comes out at someone other than the person with whom we are really angry. There is so much truth in the old saying “You only hurt the ones you love.” When we are mad at our boss, it is hard to show him. So we keep it inside until we get home. Then we yell at the wife or children. James is certainly right

when he says that our anger does not help achieve God's purpose.

So what are we to do when we start to get angry? First off, don't hide the anger. Much more often than we think, people will understand our anger and respect it. But past that, ask God for help. Ask Jesus for help. He has walked this Earth and understands our feelings. (Don't forget, however, that he loves not only you but the person with whom you are angry.) Ask Him to help you listen. Ask Him to help you act responsibly. Ask Him to help you act in anger AND LOVE. Be angry but act loving. Sound impossible? It is hard! But all things are possible with God's help. Just try it!

The Rev. Bert Eaton is Rector of St. Peter's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church , located at 503 W. Broad St. in Swansboro.