



GPS GUIDE: AUGUST 8, 2021

Grow. Pray. Study

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon: Anger

Psalm 37: 8-9

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.

Do not fret—it leads only to evil.

For the wicked shall be cut off,

but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

Proverbs 14: 29

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding,

but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

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

Monday: Read Psalm 139

You've had one of those days. The kind where you wake up late and have nothing to wear to work. Once at work, your boss is on your case for a project you found out about just this morning, you get stuck in traffic on the way home, and then your house is abuzz with demands and noises and it's all about to send you over the edge. Anger is rising and you can feel that the next person that asks you for something is going to get it. When you finally do snap, you feel guilty and wonder how you let yourself get to this point again. Where can you go when your struggle with anger feels like a daily...maybe even hourly occurrence? You can remember that God knows you completely and formed you with great love. God is with you even in your struggles with anger. How can you call on the power of God's love in your times of anger and frustration? Set a goal to call on God's presence when you feel yourself getting angry this week and see if that helps calm your days.

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for your abiding presence in my life. May I lean into your calming presence in all my days. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Psalm 37

While reflecting on the theme of anger in Psalm 37 in his book *Wishful Thinking* Fredrick Buechner wrote, “Of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.” The last two lines are a striking reflection on anger’s power to consume us. It is often said that the one anger hurts most is the one who is angry. When have you felt that anger consumed you? When has your anger gotten in the way of living a life of joy and love?

Prayer: Lord help me refrain from anger that I may take my refuge in you. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Psalm 30

Psalm 30 may be the most beautiful lyric in the Psalter. The poetry is balanced, emotional, picturesque, and expressive. The poem has some of the greatest lines in the whole Bible: God’s “anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” And, “You have taken off my sackcloth, and clothed me with joy!” For me, this song captures the evangelical witness to the God of Israel as well as any passage in the Old Testament. It describes one sinner’s personal testimony. It says that the Lord meets us in our suffering — in the pit. And God does not leave us there but moves us from mourning (“you have taken off my sackcloth”) to morning (“joy comes in the morning”). Life in the care of the savior is a life in which the garments of darkness, repentance, and sin are replaced with the clothing of salvation: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, humility, and the like. In the Christian faith, the newly baptized are often clothed in a white robe to symbolize the new creation, the new life of “putting on Christ.” This liturgical practice is more than just a ritual, however. It is a ritual that makes a promise. God meets sinners in their suffering. And God does not leave us there. God takes off our sackcloth and clothes us with joy. Have you ever felt God exchanging your garments of sin and replacing them with garments of salvation? How have you experienced joy when you have experienced God’s mercy in your life?

Prayer: *May I be clothed in the new life you offer, O Christ. Amen.*

Thursday: Read James 1: 19-26**The Fence story - Author Unknown**

There once was a young boy with a very bad temper. The boy's father wanted to teach him a lesson, so he gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he

lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into their wooden fence. On the first day of this lesson, the little boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. He was really mad! Over the course of the next few weeks, the little boy began to control his anger, so the number of nails that were hammered into the fence dramatically decreased. It wasn't long before the little boy discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence. Then, the day finally came when the little boy didn't lose his temper even once, and he became so proud of himself, he couldn't wait to tell his father. Pleased, his father suggested that he now pull out one nail for each day that he could hold his temper. Several weeks went by and the day finally came when the young boy was able to tell his father that all the nails were gone. Very gently, the father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. "You have done very well, my son," he smiled, "but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same." The little boy listened carefully as his father continued to speak. "When you say things in anger, they leave permanent scars just like these. And no matter how many times you say you're sorry, the wounds will still be there."

Have you ever lashed out with angry words to hurt someone? When has another’s anger or harsh words toward you left wounds? How can you work toward reconciliation when that happens?

Prayer: *Give me strength and wisdom to offer words of healing and reconciliation. Amen.*

Friday: Read Matthew 5: 21-26

We often read Jesus’ statement - “You have heard that it was said...” followed by “But I say to you...” - as contrasting, or even replacing, prior Jewish teachings with his own. But Jesus uses the traditional teachings on murder to extend the law. Perhaps one of the most radical aspects of Jesus’ extension of the law here is his internalization of it, so that not only behaviors, but attitudes and emotions fall within its scope. Jesus connects the dots for his listeners from outward acts to internal orientation - from murder to anger. It is one thing to behave rightly. It is another thing entirely for one’s heart to be oriented toward love. Jesus’ reframing of righteousness exposes the easy truces we make. We can pat ourselves on the back for not committing murder while we ruin the reputation of a coworker through our words—we even call it “stabbing someone in the back.” The notion that we must reconcile with anyone who has something against us before we can give our gifts to God, stops us in our tracks. There is no easy, private relationship to God in these words. Resentment, alienation, and estrangement from others, prevent me from even giving my gifts to God. Jesus shifts our attention from particular behaviors we must avoid to particular interior orientations we must cultivate. Kingdom righteousness saturates our whole lives, and promises much more, too. It is the way of blessedness. God’s inbreaking presence in Jesus Christ re-orders the relationships of this world and re-orientes the internal landscapes of our lives. Jesus gives us a new way of life - a way of life that demands more and

promises more. In what ways do our attitudes help or hinder our ability to bring our gifts before God? What do you think it means to leave your gift at the altar and go be reconciled? Have you ever experienced reconciliation as a way of offering your gift of righteousness to God?

Prayer: I know that you desire more than my outward action, Lord, so create in me a clean heart that I may honor you with my whole life. Amen.

Saturday: Faithful Activity

Today as you reflect on Christ's call to reconciliation, is there someone who comes to your mind with whom you need to reconcile? Write that person's name down. As you look at the name, what comes to your mind? What hurts come up? How can you take one step toward reconciliation today? Reconciliation is not easy, and often takes a long time to fully live out.

If you are ready to make an outward move toward reconciliation you might consider writing a card or speaking face to face with that person.

If it does not feel safe to make an outward move toward reconciliation try this inward exercise - pray the Lord's Prayer and insert the name of the person with whom you need to reconcile – like this: Our Father – the Father of (insert name) and the Father of me...then continue the prayer. Just the verbal reminder that both of you belong to God may be the first step you need toward an outward reconciliation.



FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH BIRMINGHAM
(Disciples of Christ)