

8/21/11 Sermon

“The Angry Summer”

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I have been angry all summer, mad at the world, discontented with myself, the hateful politics of our country, Congress’s inability to govern, the continued and growing inequity between rich and poor, the economic crisis.

My anger sank into an existential depression. And I am not sure why. Have you ever been there?

You might ask yourself, after two months of vacation what does he have to be mad about; or why is he preaching about anger on his first sermon of the new church year?

Simply put, because I sometimes need to share my life with you, the people I have come to trust and respect.

I also believe you want me to be authentic and honest with you; to demonstrate that I struggle with life in the same way you do. I believe I owe you integrity no matter how raw and visceral. I have faith in UUMAN and each of you, that we offer, not perfectly, a safe space to share and be accepted.

Like all of you I come through these doors of hope, feeling the same burdens, yearnings, despair, loneliness and visions for a better life.

We come together to lend and give support even when it is hard; when we are filled with despair, a sense of loss; when we are vexed, frustrated and angry at ourselves, at members of this church and the world out there.

And in fairness, we know that we irk each other at times. That is part of the struggle of being human in community.

But, I also want to share my thoughts with you so that we can learn to work together to turn our own anger and despair into hope, love and constructive action for justice. There is a link between us and service we need to do.

In Rumi’s words, “if you are here unfaithfully with us [and yourself] / you’re causing terrible damage” to those to whom you hope to show

love and offer support. Our lives need to be whole, not divided between our private and public face. Haven't you heard people say, "don't wear your heart on your sleeve", or, "don't make a federal case out of it."

These are Parker Palmer's words: "all the clichéd ways we tell each other to keep personal truth apart from public life, lest we make ourselves vulnerable in the rough-and-tumble realm" of the real world.

When I remember that, I do choose not to live a divided life. Do you?

The anger I felt this summer was hell. Perhaps I was just bored with too much free time to think. At times it did seem easier to be a doing person rather than a being, reflecting person. Some days this past summer all I did was try to decide which ATT channel to watch...The "best bra ever station" or the Barbie channel...For real, I kid you not.

One thing I did eventually find is that anger can open us to the reality of our own fears. I was brought closer to my loneliness, failing and shortcomings.

This was not the journey to my sacred center that I imagined I would take this summer; a journey to become more hopeful and focused on my private life and calling. Instead, as many of you have, I journeyed into darkness.

I felt sorry for myself. I could not find the light of life. It seemed hope had left me, and I sank into despair. I told myself that I would never be in a relationship again, never become the best minister I could be, never have enough money ever to retire. The litany and worries went on ad nauseam.

I let the ills of society pollute my personal life to overflowing with toxic waste. This summer was like being in a Cuisinart; I was mixed, dissolved and shaken to the core.

When did you have your last blender moment?

On reflection, I think I learned that when we speak our truth to power, it is the beginning of finding and staying in the light; of turning destructive anger into something positive and good. There is no doubt that anger can carve out an abyss in your life, but it can also make a space for love and compassion to enter. Anger goads us to fundamental change...to broaden the American dream of "We the

people" to include all, not just the rich and powerful. We can, as hymn # 170 goes, be both "a gentle and angry people, singing for our lives."

Let's acknowledge that anger is a two-edged sword. It can be destructive, misdirected and expressed in hurtful ways; or it can be changed into a force for good.

Anger is a normal healthy feeling...our bodies' way of alerting us to problems. Anger can give us the energy to right the unrightable wrong, as Don Quixote wanted to do. He dreamed the impossible dream and so can we. In so doing, like Quixote, we too can come back to our truest self when "we march into hell for a heavenly cause," and in so doing, know deeply that our "heart will lie peaceful and calm when laid to [our] rest."

Think about your own anger for a moment. I know we don't like to do it, but try, it can be instructive. We need to remember to be on guard when anger becomes destructive, as it did for me this summer. At one point while in Lenox mall, a young teenage girl bumped into me and spilled my drink. I flared up and yelled at her. Then a younger man than myself said, "Shut up Old Man, they're only kids."

Well, that was it; I went off like a Roman candle, with language that would make a sailor blush. My reaction did not fit the crime. Anger got the better of me. I was ashamed, after I calmed down. Picture the reddest plum you ever saw in your life. That was me, and it felt like the fires of hell.

I was furious. "Old man," I blustered, and all my negative self talk came rushing in. There's no fool like an old fool. I have become my angry father, and the angry father I once was, before coming out. It didn't feel good or healthy. In fact, it felt damn rotten.

It is only when I started to write this sermon that I began to come to terms with my rant.

Yes, I am getting older, and no, I didn't need some punk (he was in his mid-forties) shoving that truth in my face. But seriously, on a deeper level I have come to realize that it is a choice to stay mad, or put events in prospective and forgive.

Which is easier for you to maintain, forgiveness or anger?

What does exuding a feeling of loving kindness mean?

Do you know someone who does this?

How easy is it for you to forgive?

I find it far easier to forgive the other person than myself.

I have been only working on this particular challenge for 66 years. Why rush things? It's all about the journey...right? LOL.

In the movie, "On Golden Pond," the Katherine Hepburn character says, "Sometimes you just have to look at someone and realize he is doing the best he can." Each of us is doing the best we can with the capacities and talents given us. We are all in this together.

To find the hope I wanted so much this summer, I had to leave my comfort zone of being discontent without doing anything about it. I had to learn, in Marilyn Sewell's words, "what we must do only when we risk not knowing at all what to do, when we listen to voices we have not yet heard. We have to leave home . . . to find ourselves and our calling, our [true self]. . . We need to develop a passionate discontent, an anger that picks us up and shakes us by the neck and will not let us go. The Holy Spirit," she writes, "is not on the side of order and stability"; [it is on the side of action]

What hope demands of us is to develop a passion for our own lives and for the rest of humanity.

My words may not prevent your anger or your heart from breaking, but perhaps they can help you transform your pain into a passion for faith, hope and love. In the abyss of the heart that anger creates, we can but pray for the light of truth. Only when we live out of our own truth can the destructive shackles of anger be loosened. I pray for that, for you and me.

In closing I offer you George Beech's prayer, which speaks to this need to deal with anger constructively. He writes,

"Let me be patient of all these feelings that drive me hither and yon. May I be at peace, more patient with myself. Let me live within the questions that promise no answers but only signal the mystery that gave them birth. Let me turn from every pettiness of the heart, willing to see and accept that the world does not revolve around me. Let the grief, the pain, and [anger] only the

nameless trouble that overcomes me also open me to feel what others have felt. Giver of being and freedom, unbind my compassion for all beings about me, and again set free the child of grace within me."

Amen, blessed it be, may it be so!