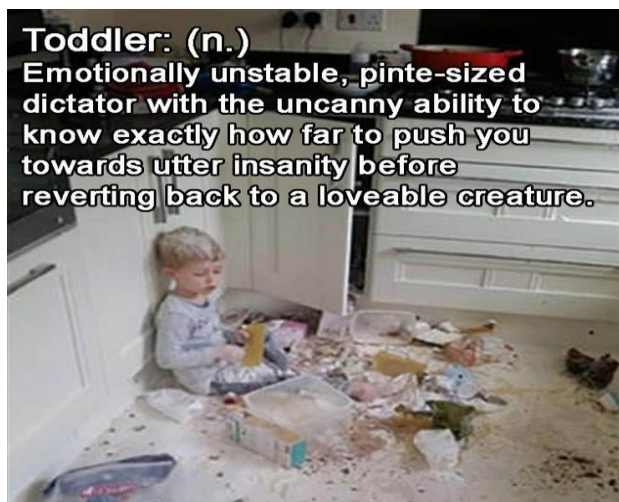


Wall Street United Church

*John 2: 13-22 - The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, ‘Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!’ His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’ The Jews then said to him, ‘What sign can you show us for doing this?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews then said, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.*

This is an interesting story to focus on this morning. It might not be one you are comfortable with. To be honest, I’m not entirely comfortable with it either. This story of Jesus’ angry outburst in the temple —knocking over tables, sending coins flying and animals running—occurs in each of the gospels. Regardless of the details, that picture of ‘Jesus meek and mild’ gets thrown out the window with this story! The question I want to explore this morning is ‘What place does anger have in the Christian life? Does it have a place at all?’

I have said this before — I have an anger issue. My anger issue is that *I don’t like anger!* I don’t like outbursts. I don’t like it when people freak out about, really, anything! I don’t know whether I internalized a worldview that said that Christians and respectable adults need to act in a calm and measured/civilized way, or whether it was a worldview that said *women* need to act in a particular nice way! I’m not sure. My anger issue might be related to control issues. Anger is a powerful emotion that can make you feel overwhelmed and out of control. Whatever the reason, I have not been comfortable with anger.



But anger is a normal and natural emotion for us to have. It is as normal an emotion as joy, sadness, fear and contentment. Whether you are comfortable with it or not, you are going to experience anger within yourself and witness it in others. Anger is the body’s natural response when there is a perceived injustice, when something is not right or fair, when your expectations have not been met or your values have been violated.

You just have to hang out with any toddler for a day to see how quickly a perceived injustice

leads to anger!

Sometimes anger is triggered by big injustices, like when your mother or family member becomes the victim of online scam and they lose thousands of dollars. And

sometimes it's triggered by something very small, like when someone seems not to notice you and butts in line ahead of you. It might also be triggered because you happen to be hungry or tired or afraid, or all of those things at once. Your physical affects your mental. So if you find yourself increasingly irritable, it's a good idea to ask yourself "When's the last time I had something to eat?"

Sometimes anger is triggered by something that seems pretty small but is actually a taproot to a bigger unresolved anger from the past. That's a very important lesson to learn and be aware of in yourself and in others. Grief in particular can cause this. Anger can be velcro'd onto another unrelated issue. So, when your (or someone else's) outrage feels way out of proportion to the situation, ask yourself if this might actually be anger at something else: the loss of a loved one, or another situation that you feel powerless to do something about.

Anger is normal, but it can also be dangerous and destructive. You just have to look at the significant rise in rates of Intimate Partner Violence. In the last decade it has increased 32% in those under 65, and 42% in those over 65. If you've experienced trauma or abuse or a loss of significance, time does not magically heal these wounds. You can try to bury the pain of the past, but it doesn't work — it's still there, and can erupt and cause harm to others or to yourself. If the trauma is bad, you will need help to work through it and find healing.

I remember someone giving the analogy that anger is like a warning light on the dashboard of your car. It's not a problem in and of itself, but it is warning us that there might be a problem and we might have to do something about it. When you experience anger ... maybe after you've settled down a little ... wonder about it! Be curious about it! Why did that make me angry? Is there a pattern to this anger? Is this normal anger, or dangerous anger? Do I need to apologize to anyone? Do I need to get help?

Anger is an emotion we feel in our body. Rev. Wendy McLean gave a wonderful meditation last Wednesday that spoke about our bodies being sacred. She pointed out that for so long we have been taught that we are rational beings — that we *are* our thoughts and mind. I *think*, therefore I *am*. But so much of being human exists in our body, and anger isn't always rational or logical. Sometimes anger wells up when we don't want it to. We feel it. Sometimes we want to hit something or someone — we want to **fight**. Sometimes we want to run — **flight**. You will feel your jaw clench, sometimes your hands will clench and of course your blood pressure will go up.

We feel it in the body. I know this seems obvious, but it is important. Most of the time, to get through anger, you can't simply think or talk yourself out of it.

Have you ever noticed that telling someone to calm down doesn't tend to work when they are losing their *\*it\**? I can totally hear my older brother's voice telling me to '*Just relax and calm down!*' It never made me relax or calm down — usually just the opposite! Because you feel anger in the body, you usually have to work out your anger *in your body* along with your mind. You have to practice some form of mind-body exercise to work through it. Mr. Rogers used to pound out his frustration on the piano. For me, a fast walk is what helps, along with saying out loud "I am angry!" If you can't

get out for a walk or you don't practice a martial art, I recommend breathing exercises where you breathe in, hold your breath, and breathe out. It really can help to settle you down.

Jesus was fully human, along with being fully God, so it should not surprise us that he experienced anger. What caused Jesus' anger that particular day? Did he skip breakfast? Were the disciples not getting it again? Or maybe it was the crowds with too many expectations. Maybe. We don't entirely know, but the text gives me a little clue that it wasn't that his ego had been bruised or that he was overwhelmed with life.

Jesus was incensed because the temple seemed not to be a place where people gathered in prayer and found connection to God, but instead a place of commerce and greed. A key element of worship for Jews at that time was *sacrifice*. People brought a lamb or a goat, or if they couldn't afford these, they would bring a dove as an offering for purification or sin or thanksgiving. As bringing a live animal over a large distance was not very practical, you would buy the sacrificial animal there at the temple — so there was an exchange of currency that happened from the Roman coins to the accepted Temple coins. So there was a lot of commerce and a lot of room for corruption. If you had to provide a sacrifice and you had to change your money, you were at the mercy of whatever the vendors wanted to charge.

This wasn't something new in the Temple. (It's not like Jesus arrived and discovered that that Sunday, instead of organ music, there was a band!) This had been going on for years, decades, even centuries. It was the system they had for worshiping God — a systemic issue that was not right.

Jesus sees the restricted and corrupted access to the presence of God as a violation of all that he was, and this causes outrage and anger. Jesus saw this commerce (and likely corruption) as a violation of what God's house was meant to be: a place to come and worship God. The temple was the place that Jews believed most fully contained the presence of God, but access to that presence was being restricted, cut off and corrupted.

But there is an interesting switch that happens. Jesus shifts from talking about the Temple *building* to talking about the Temple of his own body.

I need to thank Rev. Wendy for helping me understand this through her Lenten service meditation which is still on the Wall Street United Church Facebook page.

As Christians we believe that the presence of God was most fully experienced in the Tabernacle and then the Temple, and then in Jesus who was God-with-us, God incarnate.

His love for the Temple, his love for the presence of God and for the people (especially the many poor people who were being gouged) caused him to react in a Popeye-esque kind of way: "That's all I can stands, I can't stands no more!"

Anger is normal. We all experience it. Anger can be dangerous ... **but some anger is good.** Anger that says 'This isn't right,' anger that seeks justice, and becomes an

agent for change. When we are young our anger tends to be focused on ourselves. We holler “*That’s not fair!*” But as we mature in life and in faith, our concern begins to extend beyond ourselves to care for others and to see where boundaries have been violated. It’s not just about maturity, it’s also about love and relationship. When you fall in love with someone, you can’t help but be offended when something unfair happens to them. Relationship changes us.

We had a wonderful and meaningful World Day of Prayer service last Thursday. It’s on our YouTube page if you have not seen it. I highly recommend it. The service was written by the women of Palestine starting in 2017 and included the stories of three Palestinian Christian Women. The organizers — our church, First Presbyterian, St. Paul’s and the Reunion church decided to invite Samia to share her story — to have a story from a Palestinian Christian close to home. It was an incredibly powerful story. The power of the story is that *through it, through Samia, the people in Gaza — those people over there— now have a face.* We are connected to people we’ve never met because of her courage to share her story. And that changes things! When you love and care for someone and they are hurting because their family members are hurting and extended family have had homes bombed and lives threatened through war, through restriction of food, medical aid and clean water — you can’t help but be outraged because you love them. You can’t help but say ***there has to be a ceasefire. This killing, this genocide has to stop.***

The world has become so much smaller, and that’s a good thing. It is the same with those we have met from the Ukraine. Those suffering in the Ukraine now have a face. If you have grandchildren, all of a sudden, the future has a face. And when you look at how we are destroying our planet, you can’t help but be angry, because people you love are inheriting this planet.

Love changes us. Yes, love can make us angry! Have you heard that expression that the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference? Maybe it’s both. But love can make us angry that the world is the way it is. Angry enough to do something, to protest, to cry out, to demand justice, to sacrifice and work so that the world can be just a little bit better.

When we connect deeply to the love of God, then that love transforms us.

Do we have to be connected to each problem in the world through someone we know? No. Because we are connected to the God of love, we are connected to all those whom God loves. So, we see people all over the world through the eyes of God. Every person is a child of God. Every person is deserving of peace, dignity, self-expression, of love.

We are connected to the One who became human and took on flesh. Jesus went to the cross and allowed injustice, corruption, and sin to destroy the temple that was his body, so that a new temple might be built ... one that can never be destroyed. Jesus went to and through the cross so that we might be free, so oppression and injustice, suffering and death no longer have the last word. So that love wins. Thanks be to God.