

**Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9**  
**Last Epiphany A; 02.19.23; G. Miles Smith+**

Last Sunday after church I received an interesting question following up on my homily...and it has lingered with me throughout this week. I think it is important enough to do some backtracking. And I think there is something about that question which ends up connecting with today's scripture.

So, last Sunday, I preached on a difficult passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus referenced some of the moral commandments from the Ten Commandments such as: murder, adultery, coveting, and lying. And then Jesus went even farther to the root of these critical issues, to the heart of the matter. Because as important as the rules are, what is at stake is what is going on inside of us that makes the rules so necessary after all.

So when Jesus said: "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times: 'You shall not murder' but I say to you that if you are *angry* with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment..." Jesus then uncovered anger as being our responsibility to attend to and not ignore or repress. That teaching does then broaden the challenge to every one of us. So, in the case of anger, it is certainly fair to wonder: "Ok, so if Jesus wants us to get to the heart of the matter, then *what are we supposed to do with our anger?*"

And, honestly, that is a hard question to answer. Because I cannot bring to mind anywhere in the gospels where Jesus answers the question of anger. There are two other teachings in the Bible that are however relevant and helpful up to a point.

1. **Proverbs 14:29; 15:18; Ecclesiastes 7:9; James 1:19** -- *Be slow, and not hasty, in your anger.* In other words, be self-aware enough of your own anger arising that you have time to be mindful and not reactionary.
2. **Ephesians 4:26** -- *Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.* This also invites mindfulness so that we can make choices about our anger and not just be reactive. It also warns that living in extended anger makes us more vulnerable.

These are helpful biblical wisdoms regarding anger. But still, as you may notice, they don't simply resolve the challenge of responding to our anger. There is no simple biblical fix. Here we all find ourselves beyond the land of rules--as important as they are--into the strange land of our own hearts. And still, Jesus wants us to go there.

There is an old saying in the Episcopal tradition that "the Bible contains all things necessary for our salvation". But there is another old saying that "the Bible contains all things necessary for our salvation—but it doesn't contain *all* things." This is not a criticism of the Bible. The *essentials* are in the Bible but there is still much that *we* must sort out and learn in our search for truth and the inner workings of our hearts. And there is an abiding conviction that the *Holy Spirit* helps lead us there, people in every generation, you and I.

So, one of the things Christians have learned about responding to anger and other desires of our hearts, is that there is something about our worship, prayer, and fellowship together as a community that *can help stabilize us* so that we can be slower and more mindful when we are in anger. And there is no doubt that having a *good friend, pastor, or counselor* to talk to about the *particulars of an anger* can help. And of course, faith in God, in itself can help. Still, such matters as anger can be unavoidably *humbling* for all of us. And the same goes for *all the other voices of our hearts* that reside in the background of the big moral rules.

Today, the big moral rules--the story of the 10 Commandments--resurface in our Old Testament lesson and the awesome story of their origin in the glory of God upon the mountain with Moses. We kind of know what to do with the moral commandments even when we don't always observe or want to pay attention to them.

But the other mountain story, in the gospel reading, of the glory of God isn't so obvious. It is an awesome story of Jesus' transfiguration into light. But there is also something about it which feels rather like Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In both of these gospel stories we are easily left *not knowing what to do exactly*. Because at the end of the

story of Jesus' transfiguration, Jesus plainly says: Don't even tell anyone yet what you have seen here today—it won't even begin to make sense until later. And Jesus *could* have added: And even then you are going to be humbled to know how to receive this vision.

And I still am. I am humbled before the Transfiguration of Jesus into the light of God's glory. I am humbled before the Sermon on the Mount. They are more than we can simply resolve by ourselves. Humility is not a failure but in fact it is appropriate for us to realize our need for God...and for one another. We *are* humbled...but not without friends.