

Text: Genesis 4:1-7

Theme: “Why are you angry?” - God’s fourth question

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during the Holy Communion Service on 25th September 2011, 10:30am.

Is it ever right to be angry at God? When we get angry at a person, we are displeased with a choice they made and an act they performed. Anger at a person always implies strong disapproval. If you are angry at me, you think I have done something I should not have done.

This is why being angry at God is never right. It is wrong — always wrong — to disapprove of God for what He does and permits. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25). It is arrogant for finite, sinful creatures to disapprove of God for what He does and permits. We may weep over the pain. We may be angry at sin and Satan. But God does only what is right. “Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.” (Revelation 16:7).

A story is told about the only survivor of a shipwreck washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions.

But then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; everything was lost. He was stung with grief and anger. “God, how could you do this to me?” he cried.

Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him.

“How did you know I was here?” asked the weary man of his rescuers. “We saw your smoke signal,” they replied.

It is easy to get discouraged when things are going bad. But we shouldn’t lose heart, because God is at work in our lives, even in the midst of pain and suffering. Paul wrote, “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (Philippians 4:12). Paul had confidence that good would come out of everything (Romans 8:28), so he learned to be thankful, not bitter, even when he was suffering. Who knows? Remember next time your little hut is burning to the ground - it just may be a smoke signal that summons the grace of God.

Because of this understanding of anger, it becomes immediately clear why even our anger with other people is rarely anything to go by. It is only to the extent that our anger is inspired and inline with the revealed anger of God towards sin rather than our own indignation at being slighted or let down, that we can hope to be angry and not sin. We actually have NO RIGHT to be angry on our own account with another because the other person is answerable to God and not us!

Good anger among fallen people is rare. That’s why James says, “...let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” (James 1:19-20). And Paul says, “...men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling” (1 Timothy 2:8). “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and

slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (Ephesians 4:31). Therefore, one of the greatest battles of life is the battle to “put away anger,” not just control its expressions.

In Genesis 4:6: “Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? Why is your face down cast?’” These are probing questions and there is a reason for asking them. God does not intend to pour oil on troubled emotions. His purpose is not to make Cain feel better but to get to the root of his problem. Cain did not answer God’s question as many of us would not. But if he had faced up to what God was asking, I wonder if he might have replied like this: ‘Why am I angry? I thought I could please You by giving You the bear minimum as an offering, but I have not got away with it. I am really angry with myself, but I want someone else to blame.’ Honest recognition of one’s feelings sometimes helps a person understand what is going on in their soul.

Anger is often the direct result of a goal being blocked. If we believe that in order to feel good about ourselves we must achieve a certain goal, and something blocks that goal, the usual response to the blocking of our goal is anger.

Why was Cain's sacrifice of his farm produce not acceptable while Abel's sacrifice of a lamb was? Some think that the problem was that whereas Abel offered the first or best of his lambs as a sacrifice, there is no mention that Cain brought the first-fruits of his harvest. That demonstrates a priority of allegiance...Christ above all. When coming to God, the attitude and motivation of the heart is all – important. However, in Genesis verses 6 and 7, when the Lord talks with Cain, there is no mention of a problem with his sacrifice. The gift is not flawed. The problem lies with the giver. The problem is in the heart of Cain. Let me make an educated guess. Perhaps the area had suffered a drought. Cain's farm was not doing well. However, brother Abel, a shepherd, was doing well. His flocks were growing at a wonderful rate. Therefore, he became angry and jealous. Rather than accusing God of unfairness, his anger was diverted into a jealous rage toward his brother Abel. Verse 5 tells us that Cain was very angry and his countenance fell. Can't you see his furrowed brow, his narrowed eyes, his brooding and distancing from his brother? Nursing anger is like handling radioactive rocks, it can destroy all that it touches.

John H. Hanley, CEO of the Monsanto Company, tells about a young chemist in his company who announced one day that he had discovered a great new solvent capable of dissolving anything: concrete, steel, glass, plastic, really anything. The chief engineer in the company sent a memo to the chemist asking a simple question, “When it comes time for storing this revolutionary new solvent, what kind of container do you plan to use?” Anger, resentment, jealousy, and spite are like that new solvent. They will ruin anything which contains them, especially the human heart and mind.

How different the story might have been if Cain had asked God in prayer, ‘How can I offer a pleasing sacrifice to you? Please teach me.’? How different the story might have been if Cain had asked his brother Abel to pray for him and with him? Prayer and honest sharing could have melted the animosity.

Dr. Larry Crab, a Christian psychologist said, ‘Anger is a much more delicious feeling than hurt’. We can feel powerful when we feel angry, and that is probably the reason why we prefer to allow anger to arise within us than to deal with the hurt.

‘Why are you angry?’ Probably God’s aim was to alert Cain to the potentially lethal feelings festering beneath the surface of his life. All kinds of emotions were stirring inside him – rejection, jealousy, resentment, humiliation – but God sees that the dominant one is anger.

Watch how God handles Cain’s downward spiral to murder. First, He offers him gracious reassurance. If you do what is right will you not be accepted? (Genesis 4:7) In other words, God is telling Cain that his acceptance is not dependent on his offering but on the attitude and motivation of his heart. Cain was being given another chance which was followed by a significant warning: “But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door...” This is a graphic image of sin as a dangerous predator lurking in wait to pounce upon its victim. But God is also offering Cain help here. The implication of verse 7 is that Cain could, with the help and power of God, stop the tide of anger. But where God is the object of your anger, you are virtually cutting yourself away from all resources that could bail you out. Why are you angry?

You look at what others have got which you do not have and you are angry - angry at God, angry at your circumstances, and angry with your brothers and sisters. You must remember that in God’s house, we all need each other. Even in our various relationships, we all need each other and God knows where your specific situations fit into his eternal conundrum. When you do not understand how things are working out, seek God’s face.

Not long after the I.Q. (Intelligence Quotient) test was developed, several studies were conducted to find out how different groups of people scored on the test as groups. The test was administered to men and women, young and old, rich and poor, and many ethnic groups as well. It was in this context that the I.Q. test was given to a group of Hopi Indians.

When the Hopi received the test, they immediately started to ask each other questions and to compare their answers. The instructor saw this happening, and quickly intervened, telling them that they each had to take the test alone. “You are not permitted to help each other or to share your answers among yourselves,” he told them.

When the Hopi heard this, they were outraged and refused to take the test, saying, “It is not important that I am smarter than my brother, or that my brother is smarter than me. It is only important what we can do together!”

Unfortunately, we live in a world that puts a big emphasis on what we do alone. As a result, we suffer from all sorts of maladies: low self-esteem, competitiveness, jealousy, greed, anger, and hostility, to name a few. But God created us to live in community with each other - to work together, to share our resources with each other, to help each other out. The principle is love, not competitiveness and greed. In the body of Christ, no one is greater or more important than anyone else (see 1 Corinthians 12). Christianity is not a religion for “Lone Rangers.” We really do need each other!