

"Righteous Indignation"
Exodus 20:1-10; John 2:13-22 | Corinthians 1:18-25

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 20:1-17

When the Israelites were finally delivered from slavery in Egypt, Moses spent time on Mount Sinai receiving Ten Commandments from God to help them learn how to live into their new freedom. We discussed one of those commandments on Wednesday night at our Soup Supper devotional—remembering the Sabbath Day. I thank all of you for remembering to remember that day by coming to worship this morning. We discussed how this commandment we need to take time off to recharge. This week I got a call saying that an opening had come for a seminar I've been on a waiting list for months. So I searched and found a pastor to preach next Sunday. His name is Eid Abdelmassih Hanna. He was born and raised in Egypt. He went to Cairo Presbyterian Seminary and received his Master of Divinity from there and then the Master of Arts from Fuller Seminary. He was ordained a Presbyterian minister in Egypt in 1999 and also he was a journalist at Good News Magazine. Eid came to Houston along with his wife Neven in 2009. Eid started Middle Eastern Ministry in Houston area, and is the executive director of Hope for the Middle East.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was he responded by quoting from two passages in the Old Testament. He said to love the Lord with all your heart and soul and mind and strength...and to love your neighbor as yourself. He said on these two hang ALL the law and the prophets. OK that's what to do. How do we do love? Let's look at the law upon which the two that Jesus quoted hand. Hear the word of the Lord from Exodus 20:1-17.

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 2:13-22

This morning's gospel lesson tells about the time that Jesus decided it was time to turn tables, to clean house. The house Jesus was moved to clean was the Temple which was his Father's house. His Father's house was supposed to be a house of prayer, but it had become den of thieves--a place where robbers hang out and put their feet up. Hear now the word of God from John 2:13-22

Aristotle once said, "Anyone can become angry; that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way; that is not easy."

My mother couldn't bring herself to describe what Jesus did in the temple as getting angry. She called it Righteous indignation. She didn't claim it was anger that moved her to discipline me. It was righteous indignation. I'm still reluctant to contradict my mother but I believe that Jesus got angry.

When we think of Jesus we tend to think of him more as the as the Prince of Peace

than the Wielder of Whip. We tend to focus more on Jesus' words of peace, of turning the other cheek, more on his cleansing his disciple's feet than on his cleansing his Father's house. Jesus loved the temple and to see it as anything other than the house of prayer it was designed to be ...made him angry.

Jesus got angry with those who opposed him. On more than one occasion he had very choice words for them. He called them "blind guides" and "white washed tombs full of dead men's bones." These are not terms of endearment.

Jesus got angry with those who were closest to him. When Peter tried to talk Jesus out of going to Jerusalem because it was too dangerous Jesus got angry with him and said, "Get behind me Satan!" When Jesus' disciples could not cast out the demon from the little boy who was having seizures Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said, "How long do I have to put up with you?" Probably more than any other incident in Jesus' life though, this cleansing of the temple is the most vivid example of Jesus' anger. Jesus loved the temple so much he couldn't bear to see it abused. The main cause of the abuse was the intrusion of greed into the house of the Lord. Rather than worshippers bringing from their own flocks to the temple the temple had begun to raise their own herds and make them available to worshippers. These animals which came from the temple herds or flocks were outrageously overpriced. Also active were money-changers, who for a fee would supply pilgrims with the proper Jewish coins in exchange for Roman coins, which were not acceptable for Temple gifts because they bore the image of a Roman emperor and idolatrously suggested that he was divine. The hidden cost of exchanging Roman coins for Jewish coins equaled another day's wages.

In addition to the abuse of overcharging and price gouging, what Jesus is objecting to here is the placement of the commerce. Over the years, as real estate became more precious, gradually the commerce that used to be held outside the temple had come within the walls. The place that Jesus cleared them out of was called "the court of the Gentiles." It was a place reserved for Gentiles to gather to pray. The fact that the place that God designed for people of other races to gather to pray had been usurped by commerce is another thing to which Jesus is objecting. He said, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a robber's hangout. It had become a den of iniquity and inequity." How could anyone pray in a place that sounded and acted like the New York Stock Exchange and smelled like the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo?

This week Rachel Held Evans wrote, "What Jesus calls out when he "cleanses" the temple is not Judaism or its various forms of worship. It is a system of exploitation via exorbitant tithes and taxes that blocks access to the divine — that literally keeps the ... poor outside the gates of the temple, forcing them into more and endless debt before they can approach and worship God."

Jesus interrupted worship for the sake of justice. He moved from compassion to righteous anger to decisive action, because he would not stand for the violation of sanctuary. He would not tolerate blocked access to his Father's house. He would not stomach any version of unfairness and cruelty towards the most vulnerable and

beleaguered people in his society.

We don't hear much about anger in mainline churches these days. After all, there's something unseemly about rage, something unsophisticated, something crude. It's not polite to get angry, and it's positively insupportable to *stay* angry. But Jesus burned with zeal for his Father's house. He didn't use love and forgiveness as palliatives; he allowed a holy anger to move him to action on behalf of the helpless and the voiceless."

In this story, there is nothing godly about responding to systemic evil with passive acceptance or unexamined complicity ... we must work, as Jesus did, to preserve and protect these holy places from every form of irreverence and desecration. We must let go of the comfortable belief that our highest calling as Christians is to niceness." 1

There are plenty of things about which to be angry. I'm angry that people continue to drive drunk and kill themselves and other people. I'm angry about people starving to death while governments pay farmers not to grow crops. I'm angry about human trafficking. I'm angry about opioid and drug and alcohol abuse. I'm angry about mass shootings, especially in schools.

Robert Kopp, the pastor of Bethany Presbyterian Church in Loves Park Illinois quotes Romans 12:18 – "So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." He says, "It's Golden Rule Living: "Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do to them" (Matthew 7:12

Rev. Kopp continued, "No one in her or his right mind wants war. Even so, there are those occasions when the alternatives to war are worse than war. Surely no reasonable person believes the world would have been better if Hitler had not been defeated. Regrettably but realistically, war becomes peacemaking when it's the only way to exorcise evil."

The German Lutheran PASTOR Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pacifist at the beginning of World War II. Yet, before the war ended, he had become part of a plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler. He concluded it was not only his responsibility to care for the victims of a mad motorist but also to do all in his power to remove the madman from the wheel.

The Gestapo imprisoned him. He died at age 39 on a Nazi gallows, stripped of clothes and dignity. He was executed after the war was over but before he could be freed by the Allied forces just for spite. His close friend and biographer, Eberhard Bethge, said this about Bonhoeffer's decision to try to kill Hitler: "A Christian should not kill... But there are times you are responsible for human beings around you, and you have to think about all means to stop that man who is killing." (2)

Some ask, "Doesn't the sixth commandment say, '*Thou shalt not kill?*'" No it doesn't. It says "*Thou shalt not murder.*" The word is used there is used 47 times in the Bible and it always means murder. Is there a difference between killing and murder? Absolutely. C.S. Lewis said, "All killing is no more murder than all sexual intercourse is adultery."

Jesus, seeing that His Father's House had become more a house of wares than a house of prayers, exercised discipline. Maybe it's time for Jesus to clean house again. In many cases the church has become a den of Christians instead of a launching pad for mission.

While it is not a sin to get angry, so much sin does occur when we are angry. Crimes of passion are often attributed to anger as their motivating force. However, anger can sometimes inspire holy acts. Anger used appropriately can diffuse improper expressions of anger. Anger that focuses against sin and for God's righteousness is good and useful. Mothers Against Drunk Driving, is a classic case of focused anger that is productive and redemptive. Next weekend students will be participating in March for Our Lives in response to the school shootings in Florida. Women who have said "Enough," and become a part of the "Me too" movement taking their anger and molding it into a movement that has begun to bring about change. On March 27 I've been invited to a Pastor's Roundtable by Senator Brian Babin to discuss the challenges we are facing today. Last night I attended a fundraising dinner for the Bay Area Homeless Services. People's anger about other people not having a place to call home has moved them to build a facility to help other find their way back. *This morning we have with us some brothers and sisters whose anger over the devastation that Hurricane Harvey wreaked that they got in their "R.V.'s—their ReCreational Vehicles and came from states as far away as Canada, Alabama, Indiana, Pennsylvania. to help families in our area restore the homes they had so that they would not have to go to the Bay Area Homeless Service. I was blessed to be a part of the Blessing of the restoration of their home.*

Someone compared anger to nitroglycerine. Nitroglycerine is an unstable liquid which, when shook up can explode. However, nitroglycerine in very small amounts is what is given to heart patients to keep their hearts beating. One can use a sharp knife to cut a brisket to feed a family. Another can use an identical knife to murder someone for pocket change. In the same way, anger can be a tool that can either spark us to commit wrongs or...right them.

Moses spent 40 days and nights on a mountain and came down with 10 commandments. Jesus gave us two commandments--love God, love your neighbor as yourself, but the Bible interpreters of Jesus' time were obscuring these two key commands with a host of petty, peripheral demands--obscure laws, pointless rituals. After all, it was easier to measure the length of the tassel on your robe than it was to love old, crotchety man next door and much, much easier than loving that religious heretic, the Samaritan in the next town. God had called these religious leaders to open the eyes of their people to the presence of God in human hearts and in human relationships and these leaders instead were loading the people down with burdensome laws. Meanwhile they were ignoring the real spiritual needs of their flock.

Jesus loved the law, but he loved people even more. For Jesus, people were more important than the law. When his followers were hungry he ignored the law that said you shouldn't work on the Sabbath and encouraged them to pick some grain to eat. Though he kept most of the sacred traditions of his people, people were more important

than tradition. Even though the Sabbath always found him in the synagogue, people were more important than religion,

There may be people of which you and I disapprove. They may not have the same moral standards as we do. They may not worship as we do. They may not have early voted like you or may not vote on Tuesday like you. But, friends, Jesus loves them. Jesus loves you.

That is the faith I invite you to make your own. Not legalistic faith that fills people with guilt rather than flood them with grace. Not moralistic faith that divides people into acceptable and unacceptable categories and forgets to remind us that we are all sinners saved by grace. I invite you to accept the authentic faith of Jesus, a faith that has one goal--to help all people grow in love for God and for one another. That is a faith that tells us we really matter, not because there is anything remarkable about us, but because there is something remarkable about God.

God loves people. And God loves us enough to get angry when people are getting shortchanged—whether it's by moneychangers or by our own neglect of our own need to clean house.

This season of lent is a time to clean house. It is a time to examine our hearts and our lives and see if there are things there that would cause Jesus to be angry. It is a time to be cleansed of road rage to make room for anger that causes us to a real fight for a cause and to take up the whip for the sake of others.

This morning we have looked at a point in time when Jesus was moved to turn over table. In a few moments we will come to the table to remember that some people's anger moved them to execute Jesus. We will come to this table to remember his sacrifice that put an end to have to purchase sheep to sacrifice in a temple. We will remember his life given as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Each of us has something that pushes our holy hot button. It may be something in the world that is totally wrong. It may be something in the church that is not right. Whatever it may be for you do not think it is more holy or spiritual or desirable to deny or to suppress that anger. God has placed that anger in you for a purpose. We would do well to pay attention to it and to focus and to pray how our anger can motivate us all to productiverighteous indignation.

Let's pray.

Dear Lord, You desire not only that this sanctuary be a house of prayer, but that each of us, as temples of the Holy Spirit, be houses of prayer. Teach us to pray: to pray heartily and often, to pray as Paul directed, without ceasing; to pray alone and to pray with others.

Hear our prayer as we lift to you those who are struggling; those who cannot seem to make ends meet; those who are in need of a job, a place to live, food to eat, and

clothes to wear.

We pray for those who are struggling against disease, who are facing or recovering from surgery, undergoing treatments, grimacing through rehabilitation.

We pray for those who are spiritually lost and who are step by step making their way back to you. Draw them ever closer to the One who was lifted up that all people might be drawn unto him.

We pray for ourselves, that zeal for your house and for communion and communication with you will consume us. Give us a holy anger against things that are wrong drives us to our knees in prayer as well as stirs us to action

Hear us now as we lift the concerns on our hearts this morning.

These things we pray in Jesus' name.

1. Rachel Held Evans. Blog

2 Rev. Robert Kopp,