

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.

The text is Matthew chapter 5 beginning at the 21st verse:

***“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”***

I remember a time as a young NCO, I was supervising a small group of fellow Marines. It was not going well; they were not accomplishing the assigned task. Even then I knew they were not going to change their behavior without some incentive. Now, I wasn't really angry with them, but we did need to get the job done. So, I dipped into a little bit of stage play and came at them like I was angry, very angry; I lit into them.

We got the job done.

I was reading what Luther had to say about this text, and it appears I may have gotten something right back then, if only by accident. Anger is a tool.

It is a tool appropriate to the exercise of authority. It is a tool to address bad behavior. It is a tool to alert subordinates to the need of correction.

A parent can be angry with a child, an NCO with his men, a foreman with a worker, our God with His children; all in entirely correct ways. That is not sin. It is to be a step in bringing someone back into fellowship or rescuing them from danger.

At its best anger is an expression of love.

We can see this in God's anger, which is always directed either toward bringing His wayward children home or toward those would hurt them. In Jeremiah, we read, ***“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” ... “Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD”*** [Jeremiah 23:1,3] This gives us two things to consider, first how much God loves His sheep—and that means you, and second, how He feels about those who fail to take care of those in their charge.

At its worst—and that is where we normally see it in this broken world—anger is the door to hatred.

It's a door we don't have to take. Paul wrote ***“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”*** [Ephesians 4:26-27] If you have to use this tool, put it away when you're done. If you don't have the authority to use it, keep your hands off—mind and heart too.

Anger most often wells up in us when we don't get our way; when we feel slighted. Notice who the center of the action is here. Sin works to coil us into ourselves. Sin always demands that I get my way. Sin insists that I am more important than anyone else.

Have you been angry lately?

Have you seen its fruit, hatred, lately?

I suspect you have and if not, go on FaceBook.

I hesitate to mention politics at all. God declares in the Psalms ***“Put not your trust in princes”*** [Psalms 146:4] That is advice we must heed. But we have not done that. We have put our trust in princes, and when we have not gotten our way, when we have been disappointed, we have become angry.

Let me say that again—when we have not gotten our way, we have become angry.

Angry because we were right and THEY were wrong, or stupid, or crazy. And this has drawn us into hating THEM. Often we have been angry enough to think of THEM, whoever that is on any given day, as subhuman. This is the very thing Jesus is warning us about in the text. Hate is sin.

It seems like the crescendo of hate in this world is building almost daily, and some of it, maybe even most of it, is directed to those of us who confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. You may be tempted to hate right back. Don't!

Jesus said it plainly, ***“love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”*** [Matthew 5:44]

Our obedience to this command is far more important than anything we might gain in this world. Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians ***“whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, ... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”*** [Philippians 3:8,9a,10,11]

We can and should exercise our rights as citizens; doing what we can to support the welfare of all, so that we will have a government that protects and defends all of us, especially the weak and the helpless, even those in their mother's womb.

But in this world governments, just like people, are broken and flawed. Things will not always go the way you want. They may rarely go the way you want. People may even attack you for your beliefs; and you will be tempted to anger by the things you see and hear. Don't let that anger tempt you into the sin of hate. That is not your office. God sees the same things you do and anger is truly in the scope of His office. His judgement will prevail.

In the mean time remember ***“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”***. [Romans 3:23] Yes, that “all” includes you and me and we fully deserve the full anger of God.

How heavy the Law—how relentless.

Once while confronting the chief priests and Pharisees, Jesus said, ***“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”*** [Matthew 21:43-44] Jesus is that stone.

How heavy the Law—how relentless.

The chief priests and Pharisees had a good life. They had everything figured out. They didn't want to give anything up. And they were crushed under the weight of God's fury.

But listen now from Psalms 51,

***“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”***

Let us fall on that stone; on the cornerstone of our salvation. Nothing else matters—not riches, not reputation, not health, not even happiness as this world knows it. We do not depend on corporations, or governments, or stock portfolios. All that will fail.

What won't fail is the work Jesus did on the Cross. The Rock of our salvation became a stumbling block and finally, broken for you, He became the Cornerstone. You have heard the words "broken for you" spoken here at the altar. The next time you hear them, marvel at them, for as necessary as our brokenness is, it is as flimsy as our own righteousness, but that too, is perfected in Jesus. Knowing that, for our sake the Father made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. On the cross Jesus' body was broken and therefore God was reconciled to his creation, to us. And since we have been baptized into His death, we will also share in His resurrection.

Amen

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NOW MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING, KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS IN TO LIFE EVERLASTING.

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