

Getting Angry with Jesus

John 2: 13-17

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¹³The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making 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. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

I both love and hate being angry. Since the election of our 45th president, I find I spend a disproportionate amount of my time outraged. Since the Me Too movement, I also find I spend a lot of my time outraged. And for every mass shooting that comes into our consciousness every few months or so, I again find myself....outraged.

Being a woman and being angry makes things complicated. Having been conditioned to think that men are indignant and women are hysterical, I have often tried in the past to temper my stronger emotions, particularly anger. Angry women are labeled as "shrill," or worse. I've often been told that my opinions are too strong, not right, disproportionate, or straight up wrong. Even when I speak out of things from my own experience, I'm sometimes told it's not the "right" or "correct" experience. I've often wondered if I would be told these things if I were a man. And sometimes my answer is "yes," but oftentimes, it's "no."

Being a Christian woman, on top of all this, adds another layer of complication. Both men and women are taught to be slow to anger, kind to everyone, full of grace and gentleness. Blessed are the meek, after all. I want to be that person. I've tried to be that person. With every passing year it's more evident to me that I'm just not that person. It's not that I'm never those things, that I never have those mild, endearing traits, I just find it more and more difficult to stay that way for very long. I tend to have those "other" traits. I possess the traits that get you in trouble for saying too much, or saying things in such a way that turn people off to you or get you written off entirely.

At the same time, I love it. I love getting angry. I love feeling so strongly about something I'm getting red in the face, adrenaline pumping, ideas coming to mind, ways to help, ways to fix, ways to change. Advocating for someone, or a cause, or just being a culture commentator...these things remind me I'm alive. And they also give me a sense of purpose. I hope that this anger is a catalyst for change, on a surface level, or systemic level. I also feel great after a period of anger. I feel as if I have gotten something off my chest. Maybe I yelled, or slammed my fist on the table, or said what I had been thinking for days, weeks, or months. Either way, I feel amazing.

But with this anger comes a price. Even for someone like me who feels this strongly only every so often. Sometimes I'm with someone who is as passionate as I am who understands where this anger comes from. Or I'm with someone who knows me really well. But sometimes, a gentle, kind, and quiet soul is at the other end of my ranting. And I scare them. I know people are responsible for their own feelings, but my communicated rantings have the ability to cut others and their opinions down, and I need to be aware of that. We all need to be aware of that.

So I've called this sermon "Getting angry with Jesus." My intention was to insinuate that we, like Jesus, can have permission to feel anger. And to be aware of what we do with that anger. However, if you need to be angry WITH Jesus, that's fine, too.

What I love about this Bible story is that Jesus breaks character. Maybe he forgets his disciples were watching. Maybe he forgot that people coming to the temple to actually worship are watching. Maybe he forgot that God was watching. Either way, in the Gospels as a whole, we've seen a lot of sides to Jesus. We've seen kind Jesus, a Jesus good with kids. We've seen sad Jesus. We've seen Jesus be sort of rude in his responses, maybe a touch anti-social. On the whole, we've seen a fully human Jesus, full of a broad range of emotions, but mostly compassionate and calm. Then the temple happens.

In what was likely dubbed "that temple incident," the last straw hits Jesus. I wonder if he was having a bad day, or if he was in such a holy space getting his mind and body ready for Passover that such activities triggered something in his

brain. I think of what's often the last straw for me. It's never something rational, or logical. One minute, Jesus is an observant Jew, going to temple for a holy day, the next he's fashioning a whip out of cords. Many scholars say that this type practice in the temple, this changing of money, having animals for sale, was normal, especially when many animals were used for blood sacrifice. Some scholars say Jesus' anger was a commentary on blood sacrifice no longer being necessary. And that could be true. But he could have said it a million other ways. He could have brought silence down from heaven, instructed those doing their marketing in temple to leave. He could have made some sort of bold proclamation saying that this will no longer be tolerated. He could have been more passive, not partaking himself in the market area but going to pray, and "leading by example."

But these solutions were not good enough for Jesus. He took a more "hands on" approach to what scholars deem the "cleansing of the temple." He makes a whip and physically whips the animals free. He doesn't just overturn tables; he scatters coins AND overturns tables. So he likely took his arms, flailing them all over so coins get everywhere, and when that isn't good enough, he flips a table! Not just one table, tables with an "s," meaning more than one table!

I'm imagining this must have been pretty scary to witness. It reminds me of when I worked as a counselor in the public schools with troubled youth. One reaction some youth had to frustration and not getting what was wanted was to turn over a desk or a table. That action alone indicated that the room must be cleared, because this could signal the use of violence not being far behind. But oftentimes, the kid simply needed to react in a physical way, and on only one occasion did I ever see a child follow up flipping a table with a violent act.

Jesus does not resort to violence. Some scholars disagree, noting his whip, but I really do think this was to get the animals to run away, not to hurt them, at least, that's what my rural instincts tell me. I disagree that this was a violent act. Jesus simply had enough.

This is a scene for those who demand justice where there is only disgrace. This is the kind of anger I saw in Baltimore in 2015 when Freddie Gray died at the hands

of the police department. Many residents of Baltimore were publically shamed for their destroying of a CVS, and looting, and causing various fires. The economic toll of their actions was high. I was also in DC after the inauguration of Trump. The windows in a Starbucks were busted. Various other public property items were destroyed. I saw people, full of anger and rage, bust out the glass of an abandoned car. I'm not condoning destroying property when we're angry. There are myriad other ways to deal with anger that are less destructive and more healthy. At the same time, the death of Freddie Gray did not affect me or a community I was a part of. And as angry as I am about how the 2016 election turned out, current legislation is not impacting me or my family immediately in the way it has other families. It's from this privileged place that I can say things like, "Come on folks, that's not helpful." But also, who are we to judge people who are deeply affected by injustice? What is someone supposed to do when the very people that are supposed to bring "law and order" cause the death of someone you love? What was Jesus supposed to do when he saw his beloved temple, his house of prayer and communion with God, turn into a common marketplace? I'm not saying this reaction is always the right action to take, I just want us to reflect on what it's like for people who don't have the same privileges we do.

I think what we see here is a deeply human moment for Jesus. We see a Jesus who was full of righteous anger, feeling a huge sense of injustice. A Jesus who saw his Father's house being turned into a place of commerce, with animals likely being sold for sacrifice. A Jesus who had the ability to turn water into wine, to walk on water, raise the dead did not turn to a miracle to stop unholy activities in his temple. He turned to his emotions.

We're often told not to trust our emotions. If you feel something too strongly, it's probably not right. I was always told not to be a crybaby, so I don't cry very much. I have always been told that my laugh is too loud, so many times I cover my mouth with my hands, and I end up making this squeaking sound that isn't pleasant to hear, or it comes out as a snort which is as equally unattractive. Therefore, I have historically not trusted my emotions and often asked trusted

others “Am I just overreacting?” “Was that actually funny?” “Should I feel upset by this?” “That sounded offensive to me, should I be offended?”

And while it’s always good to gain perspective, not to jump to conclusions, or be too rash, emotions remind us of our humanity, and our being alive. Emotions have stirred us into action from complacency, have inspired us to change our lifestyle and habits, emotions are how we connect to the Divine. Emotions enable us to feel loved and cared for by God, emotions let us know that we have been prayed for, emotions help us feel compassion for our neighbor.

I am often impressed with how in touch I feel Berkey folks are with their emotions. As I sat and observed you all for my first few months here, I noticed that this congregation is very comfortable showing emotion, be that in the service or during sharing time. At first I was uncomfortable. I am on a journey with my own emotions and how they are expressed both publically and privately, as I feel I’m never very open and at the same time, way too open. So most of the time, I err on the side of not letting emotions surface when I am physically with other people. And as I sat and worshipped with you all, I came to realize, my past way of doing things is kind of sad. My discomfort initially signaled to me that I was uncomfortable with emotions and therefore, uncomfortable with being real. Shouldn’t church be a place where people come and can be real? Isn’t the Bible full of examples of people being real? From Moses’ anger throwing the tablets of the 10 commandments and breaking them, to Ruth giving an emotional speech to Naomi, to Jesus weeping, to Paul’s excessive use of “By no means!” the Bible shows us that emotions are valid and emotions drive us, for better or worse, toward making decisions. Of course we use our head, but we also include our heart. Both our head and our heart need to be engaged when we enter into community together.

In going back to our story of Jesus, I hope we all can sit and appreciate the moment of “realness” Jesus has on display. How much composure it must have taken to work with 12 disciples, none of whom who knew what they were doing, trying to teach, preach, and convert others. Being fully divine and knowing the bigger picture surely made things frustrating at times. But when it comes to

outright disrespect and injustice, Jesus could no longer teach, preach, or convert. Jesus lets his emotions show and he is respected for it. The disciples take notice and remember the prophecy that says “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

The disciples did not see this as an irrational moment. They did not respond as if someone had a disproportionate reaction to a triggering event. They saw the mood Jesus was in as “zeal.” In other words, enthusiasm of the highest degree! Passion! All-consuming interest! Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy of being passionate, consumed with zeal for God’s house.

Jesus saw a deep injustice being done, and reacted to it passionately. With only himself and his strong feelings, he physically dismantled capitalism in the temple courts. He yells for the moneymakers to get out of his house. He demands things be made right. He demands justice.

As I stated before, I’m not recommending we act on every strong feeling that comes our way, but I want to ask you, what are you passionate about? What zeal are you letting consume you? Is it worship? Is it making sure others feel more welcome? Is becoming more intercultural? And beyond church, is it family? Your kids? Racial justice? Women’s rights? Immigration? There are many things that can consume us, things for which we have zeal. But on which things are you willing to act?

Are you ready to use those feelings, and use that passion to make a positive change in the world around you? Are you ready to bring justice to injustice? Are you prepared to dismantle what has gone on, what has been made common place, proclaiming God’s sovereignty over wrongdoing?

May we be as bold as Jesus, letting our emotions be fuel to our flame of zeal for that which God loves. Amen.