

From Anger to Surrender

September 27, 2009

Mark 9: 38-50

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

The anger level in this country, many people believe, has grown to an all-time high level.

All you have to do is watch CNN and MSNBC and Fox News and you can see that anger in this country is rampant.

After watching the cable news shows for just an hour, if I allow myself, in no time, I can let myself get whipped up into clenched-fisted anger.

The purveyors of this anger in America are not only TV and radio personalities such as Rachel Maddow and Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh.

The purveyors of this anger in America are not only found in the halls of Congress, in folks such as Barney Frank and Joe Wilson and Nancy Pelosi.

The purveyors of this anger in America are not only "out there."

The purveyors of this anger are people just like you and me.

In a recent *Time* magazine article, it was written that:

"Starting after the [November] election and continuing into the spring, pollster Frank Luntz conducted a survey of some 6400 Americans.

And the first question [this pollster asked people] was whether they agreed with the [following] statement:

"I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it anymore."

Nearly 3 out of 4 - 72% - said yes [to that statement]."¹

It seems that Americans, almost three-fourths of us, are as mad as a hornet, and we're not going to take it anymore.

Yet, I believe, that bailouts and healthcare reform and new election cycles are not going to cure us of our anger.

In order for us to be cured from our anger, we are going to have to move from clinching our fists, to opening up our hands.

We are going to have to move from anger – to surrender.

¹ *Time*; September 28, 2009; page 36.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' followers are as mad as hornets, and they are not going to take it anymore.

Jesus' band of 12 followers have left behind their fishing nets.

They have voted for Jesus in every election.

They have supported Jesus in his crazy healthcare initiative of healing the Gentiles.

They have endured Jesus rebuking them for arguing on the road about who is the greatest among them.

And yet, the 12 followers of Jesus turn on the Rachel Maddow show on MSNBC TV.

And the followers of Jesus see an imposter, someone casting out demons in Jesus' name, without permission from them.

The Apostle John, one of Jesus' followers, becomes mad as well - and he is not going to take it anymore.

So John, with his fist clinched, angrily approaches Jesus and shouts:

“Teacher, we saw someone [who does not follow us] casting out demons in your name,

And we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”

John is angry.

And John is jealous.

John is jealous because just a few verses earlier in Mark's Gospel, it says that John and his friends could not cast out a demon.²

But here this unknown person, who is not following Jesus' disciples, waltzes in and casts out demons in Jesus' name.

Jesus, however, tells John not to stop anyone who does a deed of power in Jesus' name.

Jesus teaches John to move from a position of a clinched fist – to a position of open hands.

Jesus teaches John to move from anger - to surrender.

If we look carefully at the emotions of John and the other disciples of Jesus, we can see that their anger is fueled by a loss of control and a loss of power.

² See Mark 9: 14-29

If we look carefully at the emotions in this country and the emotions within ourselves, we can see that our anger is often fueled by a loss of control and a loss of power.

Our anger is fueled when we want to wrap our fists tightly around what we think belongs to us, rather than to open up our hands and to let go.

Now, I am just as attracted to power and control as any other man or woman. And when I do not get my way, when I feel that I am no longer in power and control, I get just as angry as the next person.

Last week, I had asked my son, Scott, who is a college freshman, to ship me some software of mine that he had, software that I needed for my new computer at home.

I asked Scott to ship me this software so that it would arrive at our house by Friday, because I needed this computer software to write my sermon over the weekend.

So Scott went to the Student Union Building at Texas Tech on Wednesday and he shipped the package via UPS, paying extra to ensure a 1 to 2 day delivery.

As of Friday afternoon, the package had not arrived at our house.

I texted Scott and asked him to give me the tracking number so that I could start calling UPS on the phone and so I could start yelling at them for being late. However Scott then told me that would be impossible – because he never got a receipt.

I could feel my blood pressure begin to rise – and my fists did begin to clench as anger took over my body.

I wanted that software and I wanted it now.

I had lost power.

I had lost control.

I was mad – and I'm wasn't going to take it anymore!

Then, my sweet college freshman son taught me a lesson in surrender.

Within 5 minutes, he texted me and said:

“Dad, I found a website for you, where you can go and find the software that you need, on-line.

And you can get it on a 30-day trial basis, for free.”

I had been angry, but not because Scott had done anything wrong.
I had been angry because I had briefly lost power and control over my life.
But then, my fist unclenched and opened up – in love and gratitude - as my son had
showed me a different way:
A different way that I would have never found in my anger.
But a way forward that I could only see - through surrender.

Now all of this does not mean that anger is always a bad thing.
Anger, righteous anger, which propels us to justice and action and service, is a good
thing.
Righteous anger fuels the prophets.
And righteous anger fuels us today to make this world a better place.

But anger is that is fueled by our desire for power and control,
Anger that is fueled by our jealousy and self-centeredness,
This anger is what Jesus transforms and changes using open hands, opens hands of
surrender on a Cross.

The Apostle John is as mad as a hornet as he yells at Jesus:
“Teacher, we saw someone who is not following us casting out demons in your
name, and we tried to stop him.”
And Jesus teaches John to open up his fist and to welcome all.

And when we are as mad as a hornet because of a debate on the cable news shows
about immigration reform,
When we are as a mad as a hornet because our adult children just never seem to
visit us enough,
When we are as a mad as a hornet because *those people* just won't follow us,
Then Jesus teaches us to unclench our fist – and to surrender.

AMEN.

© The Rev. Jeff W. Fisher, 2009