

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity 2020.

Sirach 27:30-28:7. Ephesians 4: 25-32. Psalm 85:1-6.
Matthew 5:20-24.

The Collect: God, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee: mercifully grant that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.

Sirach 27:30 'Anger and wrath, these are abominations'. Ephesians 4:26 'Be angry and sin not'. Matthew 5:22 'But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement'.

Well, place your votes now for which one of the above verses is right...

But before you do, you will have to define your terms (or *their* terms). What do you mean by anger, or wrath, or abomination, or sin, or liable, or judgement? Who is going to be the Judge? What are the consequences of displaying or manifesting anger, and is the penalty the same for each occurrence? Clearly, Jesus states (5:22) that anyone who calls their brother a fool is liable to the hell of fire. That's serious. So, we are all in trouble: Christians, Moslems, Hindus, atheists, - all of us: unless we have never felt nor expressed the emotion called anger. Maybe that exempts Mr Spock off Star Trek?

Let's take a step back from defining anger to examining what comes along with it. Amongst its companions is fear and trembling. When I have had to have a fight with someone I have certainly felt so angry that my voice drops to an almost inaudible whisper and I feel physically tense enough to snap. That's physiological; to do with the 'fight or flight' reflex. It's very unpleasant, and its effects can last for a long time after the adrenaline has dissipated. But, none of the ill effects would last so long if I didn't want them to. The sun did not set on my wrath, but keeps on rising. I might have really *wanted* to be angry with some one for a while. However, some people get things off their chest and feel a lot better, with no residue of remorse. Others brood and regret having let fly; perhaps wishing they had never said or done anything at all. The effects can last for years, and they are insidiously damaging.

So, I would look again at what Jesus is saying, which seems extreme, and at least give Him license to use hyperbole to make us think very deeply

about the way that human anger or insulting behaviour emanates from a deep sense of self-righteousness. I am right, they are wrong; I'll bash them! I may be right, they might be wrong (or vice versa), but it isn't up to me to bash them.

We can't help being angry by nature. Ideally, anger shouldn't be necessary in the world. It's there because we are fallen human creatures and misuse human properties that are on a spectrum between being fallen and being divine. For example, the other end of the anger-stick is tender-heartedness; the other end of malice is wishing someone all the best. The other end of being human is to be divine. The other end of being a fallible human judge is to be a perfect divine judge. Until we get all the evidence, all the penalties, and all the solutions to human nature, we have to be content with being pupils. We read the Book, and we learn. We make mistakes, we do things when adrenaline seizes us, and we forget what we were taught. Or, we determine to do better next time. Such humility is a settling phenomenon; much pleasanter than the pangs of revenge.

Please don't forget that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is available to you. Let the Sacrament pour balm on the times that anger led to sin. Receive reconciliation then you can face God and your neighbour with whatever you bring to the altar as a gift of worship.

To God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost be glory now and forever. Amen.