

“Anger, Gentleness, and the Gospel”  
Galatians 5:22-6:2  
19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

September 29, 2024  
Westminster, Greenville  
Ben Dorr

\*\*\*\*\*

It’s so good to see y’all here this morning.  
I hope your presence here today means you’re doing ok in the aftermath of the storm.

It’s been an up and down weekend in our household.  
On Friday morning, a large tree fall on our house, but it only did damage to the house, and all of us were fine.

One of those situations that could have been much worse.

It was an eventful Friday morning, however, when we HEARD the tree land on the house, and then saw a steady stream of water pouring into our bedroom from the attic above.

After the winds had died down, I went up the attic to take a look.  
Tree limbs had punctured at least three holes in the attic.  
Water was still coming through.

So we grabbed buckets, large and small, and started placing them in the attic to try to stop the water flow into the bedroom below. And at one point, I asked for the grabber.

That’s what I called the mechanism I used after I had hip surgery this summer to grab something I wasn’t supposed to bend over to grab...you know what I’m talking about?

Who would have thought it would come in handy in a Hurricane?

So one of my sons and I used it to put the buckets under the holes in the attic that we couldn’t reach on our own.

But that was trickier than advertised, and at one point the grabber lost a bucket, and water came out...and let's just say that about 3 hours into Friday morning, my patience had worn thin.

So when the grabber lost the bucket, I said a few words that I would never use from this pulpit.

I had to apologize to my son, told him I wasn't angry with him. It was just, you know...the hurricane.

After I came down from the attic and caught my breath, I asked myself: why am I angry?

My family is safe.

We have insurance for the house damage.

Is a few puddles and the headache of being without power really worth getting all worked up about?

\*\*\*\*\*

We are continuing our sermon series on the Apostle Paul this morning, and our topic today is NOT hurricanes, and it's not really anger, although that's where I'd like to begin.

Not just because of my frustration on Friday morning.

More and more, anger seems to be the soup that so many people are swimming in...

Earlier in the week, I was walking into the Y, and this stranger was walking beside me. He was talking into his phone fairly loudly, and I overheard him say:

“And then they're going to elect so-and-so...and Russia and China will walk all over us.”

It's an election season...which means, these days, lots of people are angry.

What's a faithful Christian response, to the anger around us, or the anger inside of us?

I think Paul has something to teach us about this.

When Paul wrote those beautiful words that we heard this morning, the 9 fruits of the spirit, do you know how was he feeling?

He was MAD!

He begins his letter to the Galatians like this:

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you...and are turning to a different gospel....”

He goes on like this:

“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? ...whoever it is that is confusing you will pay the penalty...God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow.”

Clearly, Paul believed that there was a time and a place for getting angry.

A number of years ago, NPR did a series called *This I Believe*.

They invited people of all different ages and backgrounds and political beliefs and professions to write a brief essay about something they hold dear, some belief that they hold to be true.

I'll never forget how Cecilia Munoz began her reflection:

“I believe that a little outrage can take you a long way.”

“I remember the exact moment when I discovered outrage as a kind of fuel,” Munoz goes on. “I was seventeen, the daughter of Bolivian immigrants growing up in suburban Detroit.

“After a dinner table conversation with my family about the wars going on in Central America [at that time]...a good friend...told me that he thought the U.S. might someday go to war...in Latin America.

He looked me in the eye and told me that if it happens,  
he believes my parents belong in an internment camp  
just like the Japanese-Americans in WWII.”

Munoz recalls:

“My outrage that day became the propellant of my life...

“I found jobs in the immigrant rights movement. I moved to Washington to work as an advocate. I found plenty to be angry about along the way...”

Then Munoz says something fascinating.

“Anger has a way, though, of hollowing out your insides. In my first job, if we helped fifty immigrant families in a day, the faces of the five who didn’t qualify haunted my dreams at night.

She concludes:

“...it hasn’t eaten me away completely...”

But she says, “I am deeply familiar with that hollow place that outrage carves in your soul.”<sup>1</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

You see, what’s fascinating to me about Paul is that I think he knew about that HOLLOW PLACE as well. Because right alongside whatever anger he felt when he wrote to the Galatians, do you remember what Paul advised them to do?

Be gentle with one another.

“...if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.”

Gentleness is our topic for today.

Paul lists gentleness as one of the fruits of the Spirit.

And I think it’s very revealing that Paul does this—

not when he’s in a good mood,  
but when he’s angry...

It makes me wonder if maybe, just maybe, what you and I have to offer as Christians in this world is not some superior moral stance on this or that issue...I wonder if what we could truly offer to the world is an example of gentleness.

Now I know.

Gentleness may sound like a WEAK word, a passive word.

How many of you have a favorite football team?

How many of you want them to play *gently* this year?

Gentleness is perceived as weakness, but I don’t think that’s true.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Getting Angry Can Be a Good Thing,” by Cecilia Munoz, in *This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women*, edited by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman, New York: Henry Holt, 2006.

How many of you remember the first time someone held you after you were born?

Of course not.

But I suspect that person's first priority was to be very gentle with you...

As Christians, we often talk about the love of Jesus.

Or the teachings and wisdom of Jesus.

Or the miracles of Jesus.

Or even the moral outrage of Jesus.

But how often do you and I truly consider the gentleness of Jesus?

You see, I think gentleness has more power than you and I ever give it credit for...

I wonder if any of you remember the name Corrie ten Boom.

Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch Christian whose family, during WWII, helped shelter and save the lives of many Jews in Amsterdam.

An informant turned the family in, however, and they were sent to a concentration camp. Corrie lost her older sister to the Nazis, but she managed to survive.

After the war, Corrie ten Boom went on lecture tours all over Europe and told her audiences that the only hope for their future lay in forgiveness for past atrocities.

In a church in Bavaria one Sunday night,  
as the members of the church were filing out,

and some were coming to speak with her,  
she saw a face coming toward her that she recognized  
immediately.

It was a guard from the concentration camp!  
Not just any guard, but a very cruel guard, someone who had been  
especially brutal to both Corrie and her sister.

The sight of this guard, she said later, froze her heart.  
She suddenly realized that she was incapable of doing the very  
thing she had just been speaking about and encouraging others to do.

All she could do was pray, which she did.  
And she said that from somewhere far beyond herself, there came  
an unexpected sense of strength.

That strength moved her arm.  
That strength extended her hand.  
And she was able to clasp in kindness that very hand that had once  
practiced evil against her.<sup>2</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

How did she do it?  
I don't know how she did it.  
I think I know how she did it.  
I think it had something to do with the gentleness of Jesus.

Paul knew about the gentleness of Jesus.  
He experienced it firsthand.

---

<sup>2</sup> As told by John Claypool in his book, *Mending the Heart*, Lanham, Maryland: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 1999.

He was a persecutor of the church, who encountered the risen Christ, and instead of being punished by Jesus, he was TRANSFORMED by Jesus...

Have you ever seen it happen?  
Have you ever seen the gentleness of Jesus transform someone?

I'll never forget the story that a friend shared with me a number of years ago now.

Back when he was in junior high, he and his older brother decided to sneak out of the house one Saturday night. The plan was to meet another friend, who wanted to wrap a girl's house in toilet paper.

According to my friend:

“In the teenage mind, this [wrapping a girl's house in toilet paper] was a logical way to demonstrate one's affection.”

So the three of them go around toilet papering houses until late into the night. When the two brothers returned home, all the doors were locked, every light turned off.

Not a good sign.

When they left the house, not every door was locked, not every light turned off. They thought their parents were asleep when they left, but maybe that wasn't true.

Time for a cover story.

The two brothers didn't want to ring the doorbell and admit to their parents what they had done, so they found a spare key hidden in the garage and snuck in through a little-used door in the back of the house.



They went into the back room, turned on the tv, and decided they would pretend that they had been there the whole time.

Before long the boys' father walked in and calmly asked where they had been.

“Nowhere,” my friend lied.

As he put it:

“There is an old saying that when you find yourself in a hole, the first thing you do is stop digging. Well, [my brother] and I didn't stop digging that night. When our lie was challenged, we proceeded to tell another and then another and then another. Each new lie was more brazen than the last, and...we watched our dad become angry, and then we watched his anger grow to fury.

“We would learn too late that he had watched us walk home, toilet paper-in hand. He was just waiting for us to come clean.

“We were told to come up with punishments for his consideration and to wait while he thought about what he was going to do.”

That waiting...it didn't last for 10 minutes.

It didn't last for 10 hours.

It lasted TWO DAYS.

When their father finally spoke to them, he asked a question:

““What do YOU think your punishment should be?””

My friend and his brother decided that they would ONE-UP each other:

Grounded for a week—no, two weeks—no, a month!

And no tv! Back and forth they went...

Their father looked at them.

“Do you know the meaning of the word grace?”

“Getting something you don’t deserve,” one of them replied.

“Yes,” said their father, “I think that is a pretty good definition. So I have decided to teach you both a lesson about grace. And for your punishment, that is what I am giving you. I am going to give you grace.”

End of conversation.

Their father never brought the subject up again.

“I’ve had a lot of time to think about this over the years,” my friend shared with me.

“In a strange way, it would have been easier if our dad had simply [responded immediately to his anger and] doled out a punishment. Grace is not easy to give and, ironically, it is not easy to receive.”

It was, according to my friend, a transformative experience in his young life.

It changed who he was.

It affected him so much, you know what he and his wife decided, many years later, to name one of their daughters?

Grace.

All because his father, in a moment of anger, decided to be gentle.

\*\*\*\*\*

Now I suspect that sometime during the past couple of days, many of you have had a moment or two of frustration.

Being without power, or someone's selfish, reckless driving...it's easy to lose our patience, lose our bearings...

May I make a suggestion?

What if the one bearing we held onto—  
with our family, with our neighbors, with strangers—  
was the gentleness of Jesus?

NPR didn't ask me to participate in This I Believe.  
Shocker.

But if they had, if they had, you know what I would say?

I believe that when we in God's church,  
put the gentleness of Jesus at the center of our lives,  
God can transform anyone's life.

And the first hearts to be transformed just might belong—  
to me and to you.

Amen.