

DEALING WITH OUR ANGER: SUNDAY 6A

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I wonder have you ever shared a house with someone whose moods are unpredictable? Mostly the person is friendly and peaceful. At other times, at the slightest provocation or none at all, he/she erupts in outbursts of anger and rage. Being with them is like living on the edge of a volcano.

Nelson Mandela had every reason to be a very angry man, but he was not. For many years, on behalf of his oppressed people, he led the movement against apartheid in South Africa. For that he was sentenced to hard labour in prison for 27 years. In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, he writes about the officers who guarded him and his fellow-prisoners. He insists that hostility towards them was self-defeating, and that everyone, including our enemies, can change.

On the day that he was to be released from prison, February 11th, 1990, the crowd waiting outside, and millions more watching on television, became anxious when Mandela failed to walk out at the expected time. Would he, they wondered, get out after all? But after a long delay he did walk free. The reason for the delay was that he was saying an emotional goodbye and thank-you to all his prison guards. In his freedom speech that night, Mandela reminded the world that we can all imprison ourselves behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness.

All of us carry inside us a certain amount of anger. From our earliest years we've been told that anger is a sin, in fact, one of the seven deadly sins. So what do we do about it? Probably we either deny it or suppress it.

In itself, anger is just a feeling, neither good nor bad. If we love and value ourselves, we will naturally feel angry if or when we are treated badly. This is normal and even healthy. If we simply deny or repress our anger this can be is very dangerous. It can result in self-hatred, depression, and even bodily ailments like asthma, ulcers, and heart conditions. On the other hand, when anger is released in a constructive and wholesome way it can bring healing and relief.

When Jesus says: '*Do not get angry with a brother or sister,*' he is not condemning anger in itself. After all he himself got angry when he drove the traders from the temple. There are times when we too should be angry,

angry about unjust situations. Nevertheless our anger about injustice should not give rise to a lessening of love, let alone a build-up of hate.

Anger becomes dangerous when it turns into hostility. It's hostility rather than anger as such that is the really deadly sin. Hostility causes us to act out our anger. It leads to deep resentments, negative attitudes, nastiness, insults, sarcasm, hitting out, and so on, at the object of our anger.

If we find ourselves often getting angry, we should look at the cause of our anger. The cause may well be within ourselves. We may be too sensitive, too impatient, too impetuous, or too full of hurt and resentment.

But the cause of our anger may, in fact, be coming from the anger of others. Some people are so full of anger that it makes them hard to live with, work with, or even be with. Think of Doc Martin in the TV series! Instead of owning and managing their anger, they are powder kegs, ready to explode on others. If the reason we feel angry lies with another person, we need to look at our relationship with that person and how, if possible, it might be improved.

What is making us feel angry, however, may be some unjust situation, e.g. cruel and inhumane treatment of asylum seekers. If so, we should do whatever we can to put that situation right. If anger can spur us to help make right something that is wrong, then anger can be good, positive and productive.

Just the same anger remains something dangerous. A Jewish saying has it: *'Anger in the heart is like a worm in a plant.'* If our mind and heart are filled with anger and resentment, there is no peace, no sleep, no rest, no appetite, no smile, no laughter, and no joy. It may ruin our health, our friendships, and just about everything we value.

We cannot avoid getting angry, but we can avoid acting out our anger with rage. So Jesus tells us to seek to be reconciled - with ourselves, with others, and with God. A little example! Before going to work one morning a man had a row with his wife. In the middle of the morning it was still bothering him. So he rang his wife and apologised for his part in the row. Later he said to a friend: *'I didn't want her to carry that around all day.'* His apology didn't do him any harm either!