

FIRST CHAPTER SAMPLE

ANGER *the*
***JESUS* Way**

reflections
on the story of
Jesus healing
a man with a
withered hand
found in
Mark 3:1-6

Stephen Joseph Wolf

idjc.org

Dedicated to Father Ryan High School's
Humbert Aloysius "Pat" Corsini
who suffered my slow progress in the French language
while teaching me to love the good story

Anger the Jesus Way

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The cover art icon by Stephen Joseph Wolf was given to the nursery chapel of Saint Stephen Catholic Community.

Anger the Jesus Way, updated from *Anger-Grief the Jesus Way* published in 2009, is from conversations and prayer of a parish priest aware of an anger affliction, centered around a story in the Gospel of Mark, the only place where the gospel writers applied the word *anger* to Jesus of Nazareth. You might be as surprised as was the author.

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Anger the Jesus Way

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A SONG *from* JESUS

Text: from John 15, Stephen J. Wolf, 2007, public domain
tribute to the priesthood of Charley Giacosa
Music: BUNESSAN 5554 D, Scots Gaelic melody
Popular melody for *Morning Has Broken*

As Ab-ba loves me so do I love you.
I tell you this: re-main in my love.
Keep this com-mand-ment: Love one an-oth-er
As I have loved you, call-ing you friend.

I am the vine and you are my branch-es;
Let Ab-ba prune you so you bear fruit.
My word re-mem-ber: Love one an-oth-er
As I have loved you, call-ing you friend.

No great-er love has one than to lay down
One's ver-y life for e-ven a friend.
You I have cho-sen: Love one an-oth-er
As I have loved you, call-ing you friend.

You have been with me from the be-gin-ning;
Tes-ti-fy in the Spir-it of truth.
In word and ac-tion: Love one an-oth-er
As I have loved you, call-ing you friend.

I

Introduction: The Story

Mark 3:1-6

- 1 Again Jesus entered the synagogue.
 There was a man there
 who had a withered hand.
- 2 They watched him closely
to see if he would cure him on the sabbath
 so that they might accuse him.
- 3 He said to the man with the withered hand,
 "Come up here before us."
- 4 Then he said to them,
"Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath
 rather than to do evil,
 to save life rather than destroy it?"
 But they remained silent.
- 5 Looking around at them with **anger**
and grieved at their hardness of heart,
 he said to the man,
 "Stretch out your hand."
He stretched it out and his hand was restored.
- 6 The Pharisees went out and
immediately took counsel with the Herodians
 against him to put him to death.

Sabbath is the day of the week. Jesus is in the synagogue in Capernaum. Others are there, including some pharisees and a silent man with a withered hand. Jesus knows the pharisees are wondering if he will break the law again by healing on the sabbath. He asks them a riddle, to engage them in dialogue. They remain silent, refusing to talk to him. He turns to them in **anger** and grieves over their hardness of heart. He then asks the silent man to stretch out his withered hand, and it is healed. The pharisees go out to make plans how best to kill him.

The Son of God experienced human anger. He was aware of the unhealed or willful blockage in the pharisees that kept them from entering into dialogue with him. God invites and cajoles, but God does not violate our freedom.

So in his humanity, Jesus feels the emotion of anger. He does not go looking for it, but it finds him. In his divinity he loves even these pharisees. He wants to engage them in some kind of healing dialogue, but they refuse in stubborn silence. He acknowledges to himself this human emotion of anger, and then holds it with grief, with divine compassion. He suffers with the pharisees who are still unhealed, still blocked.

The story itself is one of those readings in our three-year Sunday Lectionary cycle often omitted, knocked out by an early Lent (Mark 3:1-6, on the Ninth Sunday of Year B, Ordinary Time). So it is a story we hear on Sundays less than once every three years. And it is not chosen for special feast days.

In Chapter 3, Verse 5, of the Gospel according to Mark, we have the only passage in the New Testament in which we are told that Jesus experienced the emotion of anger.

What might this story hold? I have been told that depression is anger turned inward. I know something about depression, the way you know something about your cross. You know, the one you have been called by Jesus to pick up daily and carry while following him.

I suppose my depression cross is why they invited me in the seminary to take a look at my "anger issue." I had to admit it. I have an anger issue. I have my sainted mother's Scotch-Irish temper. But I was a holy seminarian! How could they tell I had an anger issue?

No matter. Full of the eager glow of a Bible student with a new quest, I headed straight for the library concordance. *Concordance*. A new word in my vocabulary. The concordance would give me a list of every use of the word *anger* (or *angry*) in the Bible.

I wanted to know something about Jesus and anger. Only one passage applied:

*...looking around at them with **anger**...* Mark 3:5

Surely this was not the only passage that used the word anger or angry and applied it to Jesus! What about, you might be thinking as I was, what about Jesus cleansing the temple? He drove them out with a whip! I know he was angry that day!

So I read all four accounts of the temple cleansing scene: Mark 11:15-19; Matthew 21:12-13; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:14-16. John's version skirts closest to anger, but we're told he went to the trouble of making a whip. When I slow down to be a craftsman, my anger usually slides away in the work. But John does mention the whip, a weapon:

*...Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
He found in the temple area
those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves,
as well as the money-changers seated there.
He made a whip out of cords
and drove them all out of the temple area,
with the sheep and oxen,
and spilled the coins of the money-changers
and overturned their tables,
and to those who sold doves he said,
"Take these out of here,*

and stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

His disciples recalled the words of scripture,

"Zeal for your house will consume me"

John 2:13b-17

Zeal is from Psalm 69:10.

Zeal. Not the same thing as anger. Experiment with this passage in your imagination. In John, this is right after the first sign at the Cana wedding. Pretend that Jesus knows fully well that it is time to draw some attention to himself and begin challenging the status quo. Imagine that Jesus knows that in the progression of his ministry those with power and authority would have to get riled up at him. Knowing that some anger among them was inevitable, what if Jesus had the most enjoyable day of his three years of teaching and preaching and healing? Have you ever pushed your best friends' buttons, just to rile them up, just for fun, or even for their own good?

When my seven brothers and I were young boys, and one of us would ask our father, "Hey Deddy (We spelled "Deddy" the same way we said it.), why are you doing this?" His favorite non-answer was "funzies," just for fun. Praying once with one of these temple passages, I watched Jesus fashion a whip to use, looking at me with a face expressive of "watch this!" I had already read the passage, so I knew the purpose of the whip. When I asked Jesus why, he answered,

"funzies." Like a parent trying to discipline a child, or a friend at play with a practical joke, Jesus could not let them see him laughing inside. So the effect on the crowd was the same. Inside jokes can be the best, and zeal can be funny too.

Well, what about when Jesus rebuked Simon, even calling him Satan! Surely Simon made him mad! In Mark, this happens after the first of three predictions of Jesus' coming passion and death.* We are told simply that Simon *rebuked* Jesus and that Jesus then *rebuked* Simon, looking at his disciples saying,

*Get behind me, Satan.
You are thinking not as God does,
but as human beings do.*

* Mark 8:31-33; see also
Matthew 16:21-27; Luke 9:22-26.

In Matthew, Jesus also calls Peter *an obstacle* to him. Luke lets his friend Peter off the hook, leveling the *rebuke* by Jesus against all the apostles, directing them to tell no one who Jesus is. Again, as in the cleansing of the temple, Jesus may indeed have been angry with Peter, but the gospel writers do not use that word. The setting and the tone suggest *anger*, but the word is not used.

And this is my point in this introduction:

The gospel narratives do tell us, with the word, that Jesus was angry, but only once, and by only one gospel writer (Mark), and in only one episode (3:1-6, the story of the healing of the man with a withered hand). It is certainly reasonable to say that, in events similar to the cleansing of the temple and Jesus' rebuke of Peter, our Lord was angry, and that those around him knew he was angry. All four gospel writers, including Mark, choose to not use the word.

But why is the word used in this particular passage? Why in this specific story? Might the Holy Spirit be trying to tell us something in this explicit account of the human anger of Jesus the Christ? I think so, and I think I know what.

What I wish to propose is an intimate connection of his anger in this story with the core teaching of Jesus from his great sermons:

- A. *Love your enemies...* Mt 5:44; Lk 6:35
- B. *Pray for those who persecute you...* Mt 5:44
- C. *Forgive...* Mt 6:14; Lk 6:37

Some wish to dismiss these as the *too hard teachings* of Jesus. His anger tells us that though he also did not always find them easy he nonetheless taught them as both necessary and healing.

SOME QUESTIONS *for* PONDERING

1. Have I ever been angry with...
 - someone causing a commotion at worship?
 - a religious leader?
 - a lawbreaker?
 - a riddler?
 - someone insisting on talking?
 - someone refusing to talk things over?
 - someone with a hard heart?
 - someone blessed with blessings?
 - someone who is planning violence?
 - God?
 - myself?
2. One definition of the word *dialogue* is an exchange of ideas and opinions between two or more people. Why is it so hard to have an honest dialogue while angry?
3. Have I ever wanted God to violate my free will?
4. How can I recognize anger turning inward?
5. If I compare my spiritual life to the rooms of a house, is there one Jesus wants to clean up?
6. Is it possible to rebuke someone without being angry?

7. What do I think about the idea of anger as an emotion or a feeling that happens to us? Can I make a distinction between being angry and what I do with it?

A PRAYER *for* EXPERIMENTING & EDITING

Lord my God,
it has happened again and anger is visiting me.
I hear also your gospel call to love enemies,
to pray for persecutors, and to forgive.
Because I trust in your way I pray:
I am angry right now with *N*.
Judging is your job alone
for you alone have all the data.
Like me, *N*. is created in your image
and loved by you without limit.
But there seems to be something unhealed in *N*.;
I know not what it is,
and *N*. may not know either,
but you, Lord, you know:
and I believe that you want to heal it.
This I ask you to do.
Lay onto *N*. your healing touch.
Amen.