

Psalm 19:13-14: Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not get dominion over me; then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offense. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer. (54)

Introduction

Anger is scary. We've all been angry. We know the feeling of anger showing up in our bodies. It can literally feel like an alter ego rising to the surface; and, that's scary. No one likes to feel possessed by something, especially something *uncontrollable*, *erratic*, and *irrational*. Anger has enough strength and power to feel like it's taking the helm of your mind and body.

For centuries anger has been vilified. Sure, there may be an epicurean philosopher here and there advocating for anger as it is. However, what's in many texts and treatises about anger is that it must be subjected, dominated, and controlled; never allowed into the visceral. The only right anger is calm, cool, and collected anger of the rational mind always in control. It's not to be passionate, embodied, visceral anger. We are trained to see anger as an unforgivable emotion. So, we are never given any space to learn to navigate it in ourselves and with others. It's that emotion that stands far off, threatening if it gets to close.

So, with little experience, we perpetuate the vilification of anger and fumble about wrestling with divine anger. What do we do with divine anger if good anger is invisible and bad anger is visible? If God is love, is anger another expression of God's love? To resolve the cognitive dissonance, we make divine anger the sudden outburst of an angry (but loving) *father* disciplining *his* child. In this exchange, you've caused the extreme response; you've brought *him* to this point—no rational man would let himself get so angry unless there was a cause because visible anger is irrational. So, God gets angry at us and punishes us *justly* as a disciplinarian father would punish.

But what happens if we reconceive anger, allowing it to be normal? What if having pathos—emotions and passion—isn't bad? What if we see divine anger as part of that defensive maternal anger of God waging war against forces acting *against* the beloved? What if anger and love aren't the same thing but rather two separate emotions operating concurrently? There is a beautiful fury of maternity that will rescue children from the jaws of mountain lions, will wage war at all costs against systems designed to hinder and harm bodies and voices, will bring forth life amid death.

John 2:13-22

And the Passover feast of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up into Jerusalem. And he found in the temple the ones bartering/selling oxen and sheep and doves and the ones being seated there (as) moneychangers, and after making a whip out of a cord of rushes he threw/cast out all the sheep and oxen from the temple and he poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned the money

changing tables. And to the ones bartering/selling doves he said, “Take away these from this place! Do not make the house of my father a market house!” (John 2:13-16, *translation mine*)

As Jesus enters Jerusalem during the Passover festival,¹ he enters a temple. There’s little said about the time between when Jesus enters and discovers the established temple marketplace. So, we don’t know if Jesus was surprised or not to find such a thing. All we know is that he enters, finds, is angry, and makes a whip.² The point of the story isn’t Jesus controlling his frustration or anger. The point of the story is that Jesus *is* angry and acts on that anger.

Being the second chapter of John, the author has barely established that Jesus is someone who has this authority. Since we know this story well, we come to the text with little excitement. But for a moment, imagine participating in the original audience. What we have thus far is the divine miracle for water into wine at a wedding and then an immediate transition to Jesus driving out oxen, sheep, and doves from the temple. The author is cultivating the authority of Jesus that is both spiritual and material. Jesus has the authority to command the material of water to turn into the material of wine. This material control emphasizes Jesus’s divinity—for only God can do this. Concurrently, Jesus has the authority to walk into a temple and drive out what is established through human authority, and this establishes Jesus’s authority over the temple. Again, that’s only for God and God’s chosen priests. So: *Who is this? Where’s his authority? Why is he so angry?*³

The answer to that isn’t provided by the text. For all intents and purposes, this appears to be a rather irrational response by Jesus. Anyone would have been accustomed to such practices being performed in the temple. Yet, Jesus is angry about it. What was commonplace and status quo, what was common sense to the people and the rulers of the temple, the teachers and scribes, was not the stuff of divine rationality. So, Jesus enters the temple sees a mockery being made of the house of his father, and he’s angry.

If Jesus is who John says he is, then anger is very much a part of the divine pathos. If this Jesus is the word incarnate, the word made flesh, the one who was with God in the beginning and was God, then what is happening in word and deed is divine speaking and acting. The anger of Jesus is divine anger and it’s good. Why? Not solely because it’s divine in source, but because of the reason. The money changers and the ones bartering/exchanging oxen and sheep and doves were taking advantage of the people. It was a financial system rigged around the sacrificial

¹ Bultmann *John* 122-3, The reason for Jesus’s journey up to Jerusalem is a festival, which is the Passover. Functions as a date. We know when this happened.

² Bultmann *John* 123, “No account is given of the impression this made on Jesus, nor are we told explicitly of his judgement on them; rather in v. 15 we are told what he does, that he makes a whip out cords and clears the temple of the business which is being conducted.”

³ Bultmann *John* 124-5, The Jews (v.18) “They ask for an authorization which will show the lawfulness of his action. The Evangelist will certainly have taken the σημειον asked for here, as in 6:30, to be a miracle which would prove his authority; as will the source, which makes Jesus answer by the announcement of a miracle—even if it is of a different kind to that expected by the questioners.”

system that united Israelite and God. It was not a system for temple authorities and temple merchants to make a few extra bucks to pad prestige and power. The sacrifice was to be personal, of one's own property, field, herd; not bought with a few copper coins, a shekel here and there; that's not sacrifice. It was to come from where it hurt not from where one didn't quite feel it. Also, this system forced those of lower and meager status to feel the hierarchy of wealth, neither being able to bring of their own stock nor to buy the good sacrifice. In response to this abuse and extortion, Jesus, the word incarnate, the son of God, fashioned a whip and sent everyone and everything running, he flipped tables and poured out coins. His anger cleared out the temple; his love preserved the beloved, people held captive in a violent system.

Conclusion

Divine anger swept through that divine space of stone and wood and overhauled and disrupted every human made system. God loves God's people, God loves God's creation, God loves God's cosmos, and that divine anger and judgment surged forth like a mother protecting her children from a threat. No one messes with those whom and that which God loves; if you wouldn't step between a mama bear and her cub, don't step between God and God's people. Oppression and extortion, violence and threat of the people brings a full-on confrontation with the God who flung the stars to the furthest edges of space, burst through nothingness with somethingness, separated the waters of the red sea, and dropped a zealot of the law bent on persecution onto the ground of grace and gospel.

This is the God who wages war in anger against death and hell to keep you from it by destroying it forever. It's not you God angers at, it's sin, it's death, it's systems bent on destruction of relationships, of people, of minds and hearts and souls. God's love of you doesn't send you first through God's anger and then into God's love; rather, God's love of you moves you out of the way of God's anger. God's love stands between you and God's anger as God wages war with what keeps you hindered, wounded, starved, thirsting, and sick. God is not angry at you; God loves you fiercely, so much so that God will take the battle into God's self in the event of the cross—an event of love protecting the cosmos from the judgment reserved for sin and death and destruction.⁴ Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, will die on an instrument of the state in solidarity with humanity in it's plight and stuck under and in sin as the one who knew not sin. It is not that God pours out God's anger on the Christ to punish him for our sin, but that through this death of the righteous one at the hands of humans stuck in chaotic and antagonistic death dealing systems and governments, God's anger and judgment will be poured out on sin, death, hell, destruction and anything else operating to steal life from God's people.

⁴ Bultmann *John* 127, "The building of the temple lasted 46 years, and Jesus wants to rebuild it in three days. By contrast with this absurd interpretation of the saying its true meaning is given in v. 21: Jesus spoke of himself, the 'temple' refers to his body' that is, the saying is about his death and resurrection."

And divine love will win and have the final word because death cannot conquer love and cannot conquer grace, righteousness, mercy, peace, all that the Christ is.⁵

It's this word that becomes the word of the foundation of our baptism and new life in and following Jesus out of the Jordan on the way to the cross. This word is our word and activity in the world as we act in and with God's mission to move the beloved out of the way of judgment of violent systems, ideologies, and doctrines. We love because we are loved first.

⁵ Bultmann *John* 129, "Thus by setting the picture of the τέλος alongside that of the αρχη, the Evangelist gives us a portrayal of the meaning and fate of the revelation, and consequence of the fate of the world: in Jesus God is present, pouring out his fulness on [humanity] in his perplexity; and in him faith sees the glory of the Revealer. The world, however, has to face the attack of the revelation. It demonstrates its unbelief by autocratically demanding from the Revealer a proof of his authority. He will indeed prove his authority, but this proof is for the world the judgement which in its blindness it calls down on itself. Thus in these two symbolic narratives motifs are announced which will run through the whole of the Gospel."