

***Order of Service -- October 21, 2018
Taking Care of Anger***

Musical Prelude

Greeting -- "One Mean Quaker"

1st Hymn: Though I May Speak With Bravest Fire, Green 223

Readings --Mr. Rogers, May Sarton, Ephesians and Isaiah

2nd Hymn: Teach Me to Stop and Listen, Green 137

Joys and Concerns

Musical interlude

Prayer -- Teach Us to Stop and Listen

3rd Hymn: Let It Be, Blue 27

Message: Taking Care of Anger

Silent worship

4th Hymn: Love Will Guide Us, Green 243

Closing -- Return to the Most Human

Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude

Greeting

Good morning Friends.

Last week, A.T.'s message invoked the power of a fierce and transforming love. The word fierce has stuck with me this week as I have circled around a message about anger, and wondered about the relationship between this fierce transformative love, and anger. In early 2017, Quaker educator and writer Parker Palmer admitted, in on an online blog entitled "What's an Angry Quaker to Do?", that when it came to politics, he had an anger management problem, enough so that a friend with whom he'd been having a heated political argument gave him a black t-shirt emblazoned with the words "One Mean Quaker." He went on to ask 'Does anger have a role to play in the life of someone who aspires to non-violence?' today as we worship together again, I offer us a variation on Palmer's query: In a time of great contention, what role does anger play in the life of we who aspire to non-violence and to fierce love?

As we hold that query, Let's begin our worship by singing our first hymn, number 223 from the green hymnal, *Though I May Speak With Bravest Fire*.

First Hymn: Though I May Speak With Bravest Fire, Green 223

Readings

Fred Rogers: What do you do with the mad that you feel?

What do you do with the mad that you feel?
When you feel so mad you could bite?
When the whole wide world seems oh, so wrong...
And nothing you do seems very right?
What do you do? Do you punch a bag?
Do you pound some clay or some dough?
Do you round up friends for a game of tag?
Or see how fast you can go?
It's great to be able to stop
When you've planned a thing that's wrong,
And be able to do something else instead
And think of the words of this song:
I can stop when I want to
I can stop when I wish.
I can stop, stop, stop any time.
And what a good feeling to feel like this.
And know that the feeling is really mine.
Know that there's something deep inside
That helps us become what we can.

May Sarton: "Santos: New Mexico"

*Return to the most human,
nothing less will teach the angry spirit, the bewildered heart,
The torn mind, to accept the whole of its duress,
And pierced with anguish, to at last act for love.*

Ephesians 4:26 ²⁶Be angry but do not sin.

Isaiah 41:10 Be Not Afraid, for I am with you.

Second Hymn: Teach Me to Stop and Listen, Green 137

Prayer *Teach us to stop and listen, Oh Lord. Teach us to stop. Teach us to let it be. When we are angry, help us to return. Guide us Back. guide us back to what is most human, most real. Guide us back to you, to love. Holy One, You Who Are That Something Deep Inside, You Who Are the Love Out of Which we Cannot Fall, help us become what we can be, we pray. Help us to Be not afraid, when our hearts are bewildered and broken, Show us the way to let inward love guide us. We pray this together today. Amen*

Third Hymn: Let It Be, Blue 27

Fourth Hymn: Love Will Guide Us, Green 243

Benediction

*Be angry, but do not sin. Be not afraid. Let it Be.
May we Return again and again to the most human, for
nothing less will teach our angry spirits, our bewildered hearts.
May we accept the whole of our duress.
May we become what we can. May we act, at last, with fierce love.*

Message

There's a bumper sticker that I've seen for many years now that proclaims: *If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention.* These days, it almost reads like an exhausted observation of our civic distress. Everyone, it seems, is outraged. At the end of the summer, the NYT ran an article with the headline "In a Divided Era, One Thing Seems to Unite: Political Anger." A cursory Google search this week of topics like politics and anger yielded hundreds of millions of results. Articles and books revealed arguments our country and indeed our world is having with itself about who has a right to be angry and who doesn't, whose anger is appropriately expressed, and whose is not, whose anger is righteous and whose is unjustified or even downright dangerous. Many words have been given in just the last month to exploring how people are channeling their anger, or having their anger stoked and channeled for them by politicians rising to power here in our own country and in many other parts of the world. On Tuesday, The Washington Post declared the upcoming midterm elections 'The Anger Elections.' All quarters concur that These are angry times. Liberals are angry, conservatives are angry, women are angry, men are angry, people of faith are angry, atheists are angry, and yes Friends this Quaker has been angry. Last week, I confess to you that I expressed my anger in a decidedly unFriendly way.

I was driving through Ithaca and I had to stop at a light, just down from the building housing Planned Parenthood. Planned Parenthood is a health clinic where I have gotten cancer screenings and needed health care, particularly when I was uninsured for many years and couldn't afford such care elsewhere. Across from Planned Parenthood was a group of activists testifying to their love and care for the unborn, imperiled by the abortion services that Planned Parenthood also offers. As I sat there in that traffic, between a place that offered me care when I felt uncared for on one side of the road, and people who were giving their time to express their care for those they feel are uncared for now, I found myself getting angrier and angrier. I felt waves of adrenaline and energy moving through my body. I felt my hands clench, and my heart beat faster. and when the light turned green, I, one mean Quaker, turned and shouted out the window "You Are Not Pro-Life!" and then I sped through the light.

My regret was immediate. I knew as soon as the eruption of words left me, that I had healed no rifts, created no understandings, forged no love between fellow citizens of this

civically impoverished democracy. I thought about going around the block, parking, and going back to apologize, explain myself, listen to them, but I was about to be late for an appointment, so I continued on my way, feeling kind of sick to my stomach.

Confessions to George and my friends, prayer, and reading ensued. Ruth Bradley lent me Thich Nhat Hanh's book on Anger. I meditated with some of the so-called imprecatory psalms in the Bible -- prayers which are joltingly, disturbingly, thrillingly, soothingly comfortable with anger, giving voice to a rage that begs God to do all manner of terrible things to one's enemies. (Anger is a really biblical emotion it turns out.) I wrote pages and pages and pages of cogent, furious, irrefutable argumentation that proved how righteous my anger was. I left my anger to simmer and came back regularly to check on it. Slowly, slowly, it cooled down.

Thich Nhat Hanh says that we must think of our anger like a crying baby who needs to be held, taken care of, attended to. That in the practice of caring for and really seeking to understand and know our anger, our anger will tell us what it needs. I have discovered, painfully and slowly, that this is so. Mr. Rogers once sang, *I can stop when I want to, I can stop when I wish, I can stop, stop, stop any time.* That's what Tich Nhat Hanh teaches, too. That there is freedom and agency always available to us -- To stop, to breathe, to hold this wailing, thrashing, mad child and ask after its needs. Patiently, if we take care of our anger, we can come to know what Mr. Rogers meant when he sang that there's something deep inside that helps us to become what we can. Holding onto the howling child that was my own anger, wanting to pass it off to someone else, what I found it telling me was just how deeply wearied I am at the truncation of imagination and nuance in our civics and politics, just how despairing I am at the endless, escalating battles to control and frame the narratives, how everything gets sucked into that fevered inherently violent battle, the default a de-evolution into drastically dualistic, either/or, win-lose rhetorical and moral arguments where vanquishing one's foe is the highest virtue. What is *most human* always seems to get lost, forgotten, trodden underfoot in the fight to win that everything has become. And the voices of possibility, of creative, **both/and** ideas, ideas born of fruitful tension and compromise get drowned out and go unheard.

Underlying my anger was a profound sense of fear at what is happening here to our country, and a crushing, demoralizing sense of disempowerment.

And what prompted me to spit out those particular words, the anger driving that diagnosis of ‘those people’s’ character, -- “You are not pro-life!” -- is my deep concern for all the ways that entrenched and concentrated power in our country seems to deeply dishonor and imperil Life in the big picture, in many, many of its small and particular forms and expressions. As sincere as I believe the people with the signs to be, and as much as I share with them a sense of moral responsibility for the powerless, in a strained binary political system shaking in its foundations such as ours is, they are allied now with those in positions of great power who are lying, cheating, and stealing from present and future generations, from those yet to be born, in order to protect the greed of those wealthy power-holders wringing the last profits from a system that is literally compromising the ability of the Earth to support Life itself. the list of the ways that our gravely iniquitous political economy is undermining healthful, flourishing, life-supporting democracy and life-sustaining ecosystems is long, dangerous to born and unborn, and none of the items on that list falls under a heading of Pro-Life. My anger that day felt like I had swallowed the sun, like I could power my Prius. Pro-Life? I’ll give you Pro-Life! And I snarled out my window. I can see now that Underneath that anger, in addition to fear and a sense of disempowerment, is a deep well of grief and an equally bottomless passion for justice, and under that grief and passion for justice is love. Love for life on this good Earth. *Yes, Love for Life itself.* **This Love** is the ‘force more powerful’ to use Gandhi’s phrase. Yet, as I unfortunately demonstrated, unseasoned and undisciplined, this kind of angry, fierce love can wear a face that looks an awful lot like hate.

‘Be angry, but do not sin,’ advises the writer of Ephesians. The context of the passage is a series of practical advices about how to treat each other in community. The next sentence is ‘do not let the sun go down on your anger, do not let the devil take hold.’ It’s entreating us not to let anger take up residence in us, not to end our days still angry. And What is the sin? What is the devil? Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann suggests that sin in the Bible is relational, is that which is harmful to relationship, and the devil is that which tempts us away from what would be nurturing to relationship. Like, for example, the need to be right. The need to win, the impulse to defeat the other, that leads so easily to a desire to harm, to do violence. Or, the devil of fear, a grave temptation, and so easy to succumb to. Fear of the other, fear of an uncertain future, of what cannot be controlled. Fear of being controlled. Fear of anger itself, of the difficult lessons that lie there. Cradling anger also means uncovering the fear that lies there

under its torn blankets, so close to the heart. We are in great need of God with us to look upon what is laid bare there.

In our readings today, none of the teachers who offer guidance in the practice of holding anger, whether, biblical, Quaker, Buddhist or groundbreaking Children's Public Television advocate, advise us to squash our anger, to deny our anger, to pretend it doesn't exist, or to toss our anger like a hot potato out the window onto someone else. No, we are encouraged rather to turn toward it, to pick it up gently and firmly and hold it. to stop, stop, stop. to get still, to listen, to breathe, to allow it to be, to ask after it needs, and to attend to that, to resist the impulse to harm, and return, again and again, to the most human, our own tender beating hearts, the air faithfully filling our lungs, the awareness that other hearts in other chests are also beating. We are invited only and ever to simply accept the whole of our duress, the whole imperfect terrible calamitous mess, and having been pierced by the sheer anguish of it, to live in faith that there is something deep inside to which we can always return, ever present: That Which Bids Us to Fear Not, For I am Here. What they seem to suggest and what I can testify to having experienced is that that act of care for our anger performs a kind of alchemy that transforms, and it is in that way that we are able to 'become what we can,' -- those who act, at last, with a fierce love.

So. To return to our query from the beginning of worship: in a time of great contention, Does anger have a role to play in the life of we who aspire to non-violence and to fierce love? I believe that it does. Like any child in need, anger cries out for attention, and gives us an opportunity to become skilled in discernment and giving tender care when it is most difficult. So maybe in this age of anger, we need a new bumper sticker, one that says something like: If you feel anger, give it your attention.

*Return to the most human,
nothing less will teach the angry spirit, the bewildered heart,
The torn mind, to accept the whole of its duress,
And pierced with anguish, to at last act for love.*