

Sixth Sunday After Trinity  
Matt. 5:17-26 (ESV)

Jesus said, “I say to you that everyone who is *angry* with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Intro:** Dear ones, you have heard it said, “You shouldn’t play with *fire* or you’ll get burned.”

And I think most of us understand this well enough. Especially coming back from another 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday this past week. You know that when you’re popping fireworks, you need to be careful and keep your distance from explosive, fiery things. That much is clear to us, or at least it should be.

But when our Lord warns us against even being angry with our brother—very strongly, I might add—for many, the rationale behind our Lord’s Words is *not* so clear.

You heard what Christ our Lord and Master teaches us: Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

Certainly everyone who doesn’t deal with their anger in a godly way and willingly persists in it instead, you will be held to account, you will be answerable to stern, formal judgment against you. Jesus doesn’t mince words here. And why?

Of course, it’s obvious to everyone that we mustn’t murder, but why is our Lord so concerned with us even being angry at our brother? Have you meditated on this question? What does He see about anger that we don’t, or that we don’t want to see?

After all, conventional wisdom in our day generally tells us when someone injures you in some way and you feel angry about it, to go and give them a piece of your mind, to get it all off your chest and vent your frustrations so the offender knows exactly how much they’ve irked you and then you can release your pent up rage so that it doesn’t affect you like it otherwise would. Generally, this is the conventional wisdom we’ve come to know, which, if I may be so bold, is full of convention and rather light on wisdom.

Because the truth is, when someone does us harm and we naturally get upset and the spark of anger at them is kindled within us, if we don’t tread very carefully and wisely according to the Scriptures in dealing with it, we begin to play with fire burning not outside of us, but within us.

When we’re overcome with fiery wrath, practically anything and everything people say and do can become fuel for making that fire hotter and more hellish than ever before. And how foolish we make ourselves out to be when we let ourselves believe that after we’ve vented all our fiery

rage, when everything is said and done, we'll surely have lasting stability and peace. How foolishly we behave if we don't think we could very well suffer for *a long time* from the terrible burn damage we brought upon ourselves.

And the truth is, dear ones, as long as we let the fire of our anger rage on within us, there can be no true peace for us. It's only by the Holy Spirit, when we're kindled from within and set aglow with His gentle light—only then will we know true peace that comes from God and put out the destructive flame of our anger at others.

I. Now, before I go any further, dear ones, I want to be clear with you and emphasize that anger in and of itself is not sinful.

Christ our Lord Himself, for example, gets angry at the Jewish leaders who don't want Him to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (Mk 3).

St. Paul also says, "Be angry and do not sin" (Eph. 4:26).

Again, anger itself isn't necessarily sinful, and in fact, sometimes it's the only loving response to the terrible things human beings do in their wickedness, in their callousness and hardness of heart.

But while anger isn't always sinful, it is always very dangerous. And like fire, if anger is not seasonably used by us to benefit others, like a tool, it can quickly burn completely out of control and consume marriages, families, friendships, whole cities, and much more altogether like a wildfire ravaging the landscape. That's what it can do.

And to get right down to it, in view of our Gospel text, the fire of anger at our brother is, in fact, the mother of murder—don't kid yourself. And our Lord wants to extinguish all of this entirely from beginning to end. Listen to His teaching.

"Whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the supreme council."

The Greek text quite literally has it this way: "Whoever says to his brother, 'Raca,' will be liable"—Raca being an Aramaic term of derision and bitter contempt.

Thus, you can see from what our Lord says that when anger is kindled and permitted to burn in the heart, the next step is usually verbal abuse.

And here, our Lord is also careful to show us that we can expect not only temporal punishment for letting our anger burn out of control—judgment being handed down from authorities in the church—maybe even civil authorities if it gets bad enough.

But listen to our Lord: "whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to the hell of fire."

Just look how serious Christ is! Do you sense the urgency in His words. In your anger, don't even call your brother a fool, He says.

Because in addition to temporal judgment and punishment, our Lord also threatens the very fire of hell upon those who would let their anger burn out of control in such a way.

This is not child's play.

We're in danger of hell itself even by what we say in our anger. Think about that.

Think about the fact that our Lord is showing us that, if left unchecked, what will soon follow upon verbal abuse is physical abuse, which is the prelude to murder itself.

But think also about the fact that our Lord is also the author of life and the lover of mankind, and He would extinguish all such evil and destruction among us because He delights in us and in peace among us. That's what He wants for us. And that's why He so strongly warns us like this, because He doesn't want such fiery destruction to befall us, either in this life or the next.

Our Lord wants something far better for us, both *now and then*, because He so deeply loves us. And it would grieve Him to see any one of us suffer such a fate.

The simple truth, dear ones, is that strong Christians are not bitter, angry people. No, God's will for us and our character as Christians is that we'd be peaceful, calm, and meek—even despite being harmed by our brother—and *that* is a disposition which can only be kindled within us by the Holy Spirit, and it's exactly what He desires to work in us by His grace.

**II.** But, you might say, “Well, Pastor, what am I supposed to do with my anger when I remember what someone has done to me? What if I'm literally bearing scars from the evil someone did to me? I can't just completely forget what happened.

And that may be true. But there are a few other things you shouldn't forget either.

You shouldn't forget how deeply we've angered the Lord God by our own sins, how far short we've fallen from how we ought to be towards Him in keeping with the 10 commandments, and what fiery wrath we all deserve because of it.

But you should also remember that that the Lord our God did not want to vent His full fiery wrath and fury upon us, but that we would be reconciled to Him and have peace instead, even despite the evil we've done.

And that's why, our Savior, Jesus, the very Son of God in the flesh, to this day, bears the scars that made for our peace with the Father, when He shed His divine blood on the cross to cover over our sins and turn away the wrath of God against us.

And Jesus is not resentful towards you because of it; He doesn't desire to keep a record of wrongs against you but that you would know peace with the Father and one another in the Spirit,

and that in your own life, despite the great evil done against you, despite the great suffering you've endured at the hands of another, despite all of it, that you too would overcome evil with good as He did and seek peace with your brother who's sinned against you.

If you must be angry, then be angry first at your own sins and at the devil who's brought such corruption and perversion to mankind that your brother thought they would gain some temporal benefit by sinning against you like they did.

**III.** And if I could commend one last thing to you, dear ones, before I end my homily to you all this morning, it'd be this: that the Lord most certainly will avenge the evil done to His beloved children in Christ Jesus—to all of you who are one with Him by faith through your baptism.

And for those who do such evil against you and refuse to repent, what's coming for them from God Himself is fiery wrath and anger and judgment in hell that is so thorough and comprehensive and utterly terrifying, that you shouldn't wish it upon anyone.

But instead, you should intercede for those who've sinned against you, that God would grant them repentance and forgiveness because as the Scriptures say, it is a *dreadful* thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31).

And it's this very fact that brought our Lord to rebuke His own disciples as you may remember in Luke chapter 9, when Jesus sent messengers ahead of Him into a Samaritan village to prepare for His arrival, but they rejected Jesus and scorned Him. And when James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them."

Because that's not what He wants for us or for anyone, that we should be consumed by God's anger or our own, but instead that we would know His peace and reconciliation through Him and bring others into these things as well.

Don't play with fire, dear ones, but let the gentle flame of the Spirit of God's Son burn within you and illumine you with His peaceful light.

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.