

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Genesis 4:1-12, James 1:19-21

### **Genesis 4:1-12: Cain Murders Abel**

*4 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord." 2 Next, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So, Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. 6 The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."*

*8 Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. 9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" 10 And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."*

### **James 1:19-21: Hearing and Doing the Word**

*19 You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. 21 Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.*

I preached my very first sermon at my home church, The Lititz Church of the Brethren. It was a sermon on Christian hospitality. My dad was my worship leader. We were filling in for Pastors Jimmy and Ralph who were on their way to Annual Conference, which is where Don and I were heading after I preached.

I was nervous, even though I was preaching a sermon I was familiar with and had revised after preaching it to peers for evaluation for a preaching course. After the service ended, my dad and I moved to the back of the sanctuary to greet everyone as they exited. People were gracious with their comments—all except for one person.

When one lady got to me, she slugged me in the face. She then hit my dad in the arm, and she moved quickly out of the building, almost knocking over a very pregnant woman. I was shocked and confounded by her behavior. Clearly, she was angry about something. I wondered what I had done or said to upset her. I wasn't even sure who she was until someone told me. Needless to say, my confidence was wounded.

What I learned later is that the woman who slugged me had a mental illness and had not taken her medicine for a few days. When she went to church that morning and she was expecting, and needing to hear and see, pastor Ralph, not me. Her disappointment led to anger, and she took it out on me.

Anger is the topic we are going to think about this morning. There's a misconception in society that Christians should not get angry because Jesus teaches that we are to love one

another. But we know that even Christians experience anger. We are spiritual, physical, and emotional people, just like everyone else, with the ability/need to make choices about what we will do and say in reaction to what we are feeling, and sometimes, anger rears its ugly head.

Anger is a protective behavior. The central issue behind anger is protection against being hurt—hurt emotionally as well as otherwise. Feelings of anger can arise in many different contexts. Experiencing unjust treatment, hearing a criticism, or simply not getting what you want are but a few of the potential triggers. The experience of anger can range from mild irritation to frustration and all the way up to seething rage. As a matter of fact, even boredom is a mild version of anger in the form of dissatisfaction with what is happening.

The bible is full of stories of moments when anger was unleashed. For example, the story we read this morning about Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve. Cain becomes very angry when God approves of Abel's offerings and not his. This story provides us with a perfect example that anger is a secondary emotion—meaning some other emotion always comes first and triggers our anger response. The emotions that come first are called primary emotions.

A primary emotion is any emotion that precedes anger. A primary emotion is a painful hurt feeling, such as loneliness, sadness, a feeling of inadequacy, rejection, worthlessness, and fear. Anger never happens without first experiencing a primary emotion. We can see in today's story that feelings of perceived rejection and jealousy were driving Cain's anger.

An important step in anger management is recognizing your primary emotions. Cain is not able to do this, even after God warns him. We read in verses six and seven from the Message, "God spoke to Cain: 'Why this tantrum? Why the sulking? If you do well, won't you be accepted? And if you don't do well, sin is lying in wait for you, ready to pounce; it's out to get you, you've got to master it.'" God points out that Cain has the opportunity to change and do what is pleasing to God, AND God warns Cain that if he does not keep his anger in check, sin could take over, which it does. Cain loses control of his anger and eventually murders his brother. Sin won and Cain had to live with the consequences of his sin.

The scripture we heard read to us from James tells us to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness." I hear this telling us to slow down when we feel anger and take a moment to explore what is spurring our anger before we use it to cause harm with our words or actions.

Pause and see if you can identify the primary emotion driving the anger. If it's hard to notice anything but the anger, start by exploring your thoughts which are what fuel all emotions. Also, by slowing down your response, you can figure out whether another's words or actions are truly unjust or simply a blow to your ego.

Keep in mind that the shift from a primary emotion turning into anger is typically quite fast and unconscious. By identifying the primary emotion and reexamining the words and/or actions that stirred up your emotions, you can more easily determine the best course of action to resolve your problem. Now, lest we forget, we have someone on our side to help us catch ourselves and review the situation, and that's the Holy Spirit. But remember, as in the case of Cain, we need to work on having a faithful relationship with our Creator God to have the advantage of the Holy Spirit.

Having said all of this thus far, I don't want to imply that we should stuff our anger. Identifying the emotions that could lead to anger and the circumstances that triggered our emotions is not always enough to heal our anger. Unresolved, stuffed anger is unhealthy for us and it is likely to explode at a later date with tragic results. In Ephesians 4:26 we read, "Go ahead

and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life.”

In a 1994 article, “Wars’ Lethal Leftovers Threaten Europeans,” Associated Press reporter Christopher Burns wrote: “The bombs of World War II are still killing in Europe. They turn up—and sometimes blow up—at construction sites, in fishing nets, or on beaches fifty years after the guns fell silent.

“Hundreds of tons of explosives are recovered every year in France alone. Thirteen old bombs exploded in France last year, killing twelve people and wounding eleven, the Interior Ministry said.

“I’ve lost two of my colleagues,” said Yvon Bouvet, who heads a government team in the Champagne-Ardennes region that defuses explosives from both World War I and II. ‘Unexploded bombs become more dangerous with time,’ Bouvet said. ‘With the corrosion inside, the weapon becomes more unstable, the detonator can be exposed.’”

What is true of lingering bombs is also true of lingering anger. Buried anger will explode when we least expect it.

Dealing with our anger is another meaning of God’s words to Cain. Not only did Cain need to keep his anger in check, he needed to deal with it instead of holding on to it. Sometimes people feel justified to hold on to their anger whether they are in the right or not; and when it explodes, not if it explodes, but when it explodes, others get hurt. Families, friendships, even churches experience brokenness, some of which ends up being permanent.

Unresolved anger is also one of Satan’s tools to mess up your own life. When a rattlesnake is cornered, sometimes it becomes so angry that it bites itself. When a man harbors hatred or bitterness in his heart he is poisoning himself just like the rattlesnake that bites itself. Harboring anger can affect a person’s physical health. It robs people of self-confidence. It traps people in the sludge of emotional pain. It keeps people from being all that God created them to be by separating them from opportunities and people that otherwise would encourage or help them to pursue goals. Those who harbor anger really should be asking themselves, is it really worth it?

We deal with anger by confronting one another with love, by listening openly to one another, sometimes by compromising, by respecting one another and sometimes agreeing to disagree, by forgiving each other, by loving each other, as Christ loves us.

Yes, I said, by loving one another. Isn’t that what Jesus said we should do. We don’t need to see eye to eye to love one another. Jesus never said that we should only love those who think the way we think or do what we want them to do. Love conquers all, including anger.

We all experience anger in our personal lives. The same is true in our corporate life as the church. In our denomination right now, there is anger threatening to permanently divide us. Has there been any anger unleashed or harbored here among this congregation? I know for a fact that there has been, and some people chose to leave because of their anger. I feel that is very unfortunate. It’s a sad way to deal with one’s anger.

A lady once came to Billy Sunday and attempted to rationalize her angry outbursts. She said, “There’s nothing wrong with losing my temper. I blow up, and then it’s all over.”

Mr. Sunday replied, “So does a shotgun, and look at the damage it leaves behind!”

I know some of you feel pain and sadness because people left. That’s totally understandable. Perhaps, given time, they will return, but if not, we need to move on, held together by our love for God and each other. This same love, God’s love living in and through us, defeats all anger that threatens to tear us apart.

*November 17, 2019 - No Room for Anger*

Remember what it says in 1 Corinthians 13, “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. “

Anger and all of the primary emotions leading to anger, tears down and destroys. But we will, WE WILL, survive, overcome and rise above anger and all the negative emotions that go with it, to be a united body, showing and taking to the world around us, the living Christ. Amen.