



LESSONS IN LIVING

Loving Through Difficult Times

“Part 7: Love is Not Prone to Anger”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
September 20, 2026

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (*The Inclusive Bible*)
Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, and it is not snobbish; it is never rude or self-seeking; it is not prone to anger, nor does it brood over injuries. Love doesn't rejoice in what is wrong, but rejoices in the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure.

Sermon

Paul is giving us, I think, a priceless treasury with this passage, the love passage. And what you can't see in English is he's using a lot of words that were from philosophy of the time. And so, we're going a word at a time through this passage. We're understanding love as a balance of these different virtues. You remember in the ancient world, there was temperance, justice, wisdom, courage. Those kinds of were seen as the pillars of our true humanity. That if I'm going to love another person, I've got to have courage.

You can see it in the MAGA movement. If you're afraid of everything that moves, you're not going to be very loving. If you're afraid of immigrants, if you're afraid of families with transgender children, you're not going to be very alpha. You may *think* you're alpha, but if you're scared of your own shadow, that's kind of a pathetic thing.

Love takes courage. Love takes temperance. You can't have an economic system that's based on profit and get there. The economic system has to be based on human betterment. Justice has to be a part of it. The idea that there were Christians who human trafficked people of color through the first two-thirds of this nation's history is a blot on Christianity itself.

So, we have to do better, but to do that, we have to be different. We can't be popular with the people who hate all of these groups. You have to realize that the price tag to love is rejection by the people who hate. In a culture that suffers from racism, if you step out of that or even attempt

to step out of it, you'll be seen as a traitor and a heretic. In a country where women are not viewed as complete persons under the Constitution; never have been. You can't get to love if you don't offer justice for all human beings.

Anger is kind of interesting. In a lot of the wisdom cultures, it has a bad name. But we wouldn't be here if it wasn't for anger. All of our emotions are important. The trick with anger is it's so easy to get stuck in it. It's kind of a rocket fuel, and it's incredibly valuable to get to commitment, to get to our virtues, to justice. But you can only drive on anger for so long before it starts eating you from the inside.

So, the trick that we've learned from so many human rights workers through the ages is start where you are, which is if it's anger, that's just fine. But commit yourself to justice and don't feel like you have to feel angry all the time. You can do the work of justice and still be at inner peace, at least a lot of the time.

Did anybody watch the horrible sci-fi show "Lost in Space"? Anybody old enough to remember that? They've done replays of it. It was just a horrible show. But there was a robot you're supposed to be afraid of, Robbie the Robot. Robbie the Robot's not a good name for somebody you're supposed to be afraid of in the first place. But they put Robbie's buttons on his chest. And so all of these aliens would just simply have to push the buttons to turn him off. I would suggest that if you were raised with an ordinary understanding of anger, you may have buttons on your chest so that other people who mean *nothing* to you are able to push those buttons. And you think of how exhausting that can be.

I think it may have started with Rush Limbaugh, where people just started getting off on anger. And I don't know how many of you listened to his radio show, but it was like 3 hours of just getting angry. And he would act like he was going to be logical. He'd start off with these logical premises and then just start calling people names out of nowhere and then go back supposedly to logic. There were television shows where the whole point was to get angry at somebody.

So, it can feel like it's a delicious treat. The only thing is there's not a whole lot of you left when you go to that meal. It eats us if we're not careful. I need some help. This sermon isn't going to mean anything to you if it's seen as kind of just a sermon. The question I would want to ask is, what does anger do inside of you? What does it feel like? Where do you feel it? So, let's just throw out some ideas. (Congregation: *Heart*. So, one of the places you feel it is in your heart. *Tension*. You get nerves, the jaw. *Stomach*. *Right underneath your skin, that kind of itchy, tingling*. *Painful, like it wants to burst out*.)

It feels a lot like Hell is described. And again, all of the emotions are sacred, right? And there are lots of people who are taught not to ever get angry, and that's not going to help either. The point again is to feel your inner wisdom and lead yourself to this conviction, to the path that you're going to walk. So that's where you feel it in your body.

Here's the harder part. Can you see in the world what anger is doing to your vision? That's the wisdom we need. And nobody can give that to you. You have to go into your own experience. But let's throw out some ideas. What does anger look like in the world? What does the world

look like when you're angry? (Congregation: *Dark. War. Chaotic. Wildfires. Aggression. Distorted. Oppression.*)

And again, the less we're in touch with ourselves, the more we think that's external to us. And a lot of the people are doing *really* bad things right now, that's what the world looks like to them.

The MAGA movement is a spiritual dumpster. You cannot be a truthful person and live there. You have to cooperate with Donald Trump's lies, or you cannot blend in with the group. You can't have the values that founded the country. I mean, they were imperfect when they were founded, of course. At the same time, when the President has a Pledge of Allegiance to the President, you know you're living in an ashtray of what used to be a democracy. But none of this is hopeless. We have to realize that our time in history is also the time where we manifest the spiritual qualities. Sometimes the worse things seem, the more revelation there is there.

One of the things that has really struck me through the years is how anger can be a secondary emotion. Somebody can get hurt first and they don't want to feel *that*, so they feel angry instead. It's so much easier to feel anger than sadness. It's so much easier to feel anger than the shame that every white person should feel for the history of this country; that every man should feel when they eventually release the maternal mortality rate, and you realize that the right-to-life movement has killed women from the very beginning.

We understand the storm that people get stuck in. We have to understand it at some level. That doesn't mean we have to tolerate people getting abused. We can't do that. But love is what gives us the discernment of the virtues to bring to that struggle, and that's what gives us clarity. Once we start calling each other names, that's lost. I've kind of decided I'm going to start blocking people from Facebook if they just call names. I mean, they think they're being rational, but you haven't refuted anything by calling them a name. So, we have to invite people inside themselves for them to feel what's missing in their lives.

There was a clinical story, and some of you psychological people can tell me, I don't know if it's been repeated or whatever, but for me it was very formative either as a myth or as a study. And that is that they took 187 college students; unfortunately, they were all men, so this is a very tainted study in the first place. But they injected them with adrenaline. And for some of the people, they had somebody complaining in the room, and the people that had been injected with adrenaline moved to rage under those conditions. Other people that had playful, creative people in the room moved to a more euphoric response. Which has always suggested to me that we can do the work of justice without losing inner peace, that there is some way to dance our way to the beloved community.

If anger is a secondary emotion, if sometimes what people are really feeling is shame, grief, you know this is a time when what Donald Trump has done is tell people they don't have to feel the shame. They don't have to feel the grief. They don't have to feel the fear. By feeling those things ourselves, we can embody the humanity that people can't find in themselves.

There was a quote on Facebook, and we know it's got to be true if it's on Facebook. (*Laughter*) In this case, I think it— at least close enough. It goes,

15 months of mass deportations and your rent hasn't gone down. Your groceries are even more expensive and so is your power bill. Maybe it's time to admit immigrants aren't the problem.

How many places have people been tricked into anger so they wouldn't have to feel the deeper feelings. But America's never going to heal if we don't go into that shame, into that fear, into that grief.

What is happening now is out of our control. So, we have to learn the skill set of letting go of the things we can't control. Because when you think about it, what a great example you can be of a human being. That's an incredible power, and it's exactly what the world needs right now. Anger is a superpower; it's rocket fuel, but we have to get it engaged into the virtues.

I was on my way to Presbytery decades ago, and I'd already done a lot of mischief, but I hadn't gotten in trouble yet, at least not big time. So, all of a sudden, I get a phone call. I'm in the car, we're on our way to Presbytery, and it's a reporter wanting my comment to having charges filed against me. I'd agreed to do a same-gender wedding. And it was going to be like other clergy in Austin. It's 50 people, and during the week, every other minister chickened out. So, I was stuck making it look like I was doing 50 things just to rub in people's faces. And it was very kind of scary, very unpleasant.

And I had a dream where I was a bee and I was trying to sting a crocodile. And the skin of the crocodile was so thick I couldn't do anything. And that kind of summarized my ministry up to that point. I could defy the law, but they weren't going to kick a heterosexual out because they would actually feel what they're doing. And then in the dream, the alligator, crocodile (I'm not a biologist) swallows me. And at first fear, but then all of a sudden I look around and it's all pink, stingable flesh. And I realized that when I was on trial, they're not going to be able to shut me up. They will have to listen to what I'm saying. And they can't just let me go for procedural reasons.

None of us would choose to be a church that gets protested, that gets spies, gets called names. But how important it is that you're a part of this community. And as we tell the story, the people that were there at the worst of the times are such an important part of the story; just being here.

So, I think what Paul would say to us is to go ahead and feel the fear that you feel but give that fear to love. Let it get transformed into courage by remembering who you love and what you love. Go ahead and feel the shame of what America has done and been, and let that get transformed into a passion for justice for all people. Go ahead and grieve what America has said it was that we've never been, and let that go so that the new world can be born. And what I think we will all discover is that when we enter into the struggle, the storm, the crises, it will be a chance to both learn and teach the radical universal love of Jesus Christ in ways we've never been able to do when we were safe.

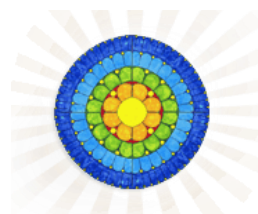
We'll take a moment for you to think about how you would understand these words.

Benediction

Rev. Erica Knisely

May you stay balanced when the world rages around you. May you channel your anger into meaningful action that makes everyone's life better. May you be filled, filled with the peace that springs from love, the very ground of our being. Go in peace, go in love, go in joy. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.



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