

## Dear Central Friends in Christ,

"I'm angry at you!" my 3 year old nephew spewed at me when I made him put his lifejacket on before getting onto the pontoon boat for a ride on Lake Shishibogama in northern Wisconsin. As I looked at his little hands on the hips scowl that accompanied his impassioned words, I had to turn away and do that quiet, all to myself, parent laugh that can't be seen by the child who is taking this all too seriously. I reminded Adam that he did a good job of telling me his feelings but that the lifejacket would keep him safe and help us all have a happier ride on his great-grandmother's boat. As he reluctantly put on the jacket, his scowl softened and he bounced back to the seat where he could watch the white wake spill from the motor's propeller, and life was all good again.

On the front page of the *Kansas City Star* (Aug. 21), there was a headline article entitled, "The Politics of Anger." It reminded readers, from social and psychological sciences, how anger is a natural response to large social and political movements in our nation. Undoubtedly, one makes the connection with the recent townhall tirades as major social, political and economic movements are expected and anticipated around the issues of healthcare reform in our nation.

Psychologists suggest that this anger is built on many other feelings of being a nation frustrated with job loss, anxious about the economy, and fearful about our pensions and security.

What does our faith have to say about these feelings and how we, as the Body of Christ, are to make a response? The scriptures teach that anger is a natural feeling, a part of being human. The early stories of Genesis and Exodus demonstrate that natural emotion in the anger between Cain and Abel and God's own anger toward the chosen people for their unfaithfulness and confidence in God's plan for them.

Certainly, righteous anger, much like Jesus revealed when the Pharisees in the synagogue put the law of the temple

before the healing of a man with a 'withered hand,' is connected to following our God of justice and serving those who are overlooked by the systems of our day (Mark 3:1-6). It has been righteous anger which has fueled social justice movements such as the suffrage movement, civil rights and the end to apartheid.

Anger, when unchecked, can also grow from fear or anxiety. When we feel like we can't manage our surroundings or relationships, that we are not in control of things around us, or are anxious about an unknown future, our fears and anxieties can translate to anger. The Psalmist admonishes us to dig deeply into those places of fear and anxiety, and recognize that God is there:

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult...the nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; He utters his voice, the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psalm 46:1-7).

"Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices. Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil. For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land" (Psalm 37:7-8).

Persevere in the practices of faith. Depend on God. Trust in the Holy Spirit to guide through unknown experiences and places. The writer to the Ephesians gives some of the best wisdom on dealing with anger:

"So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil . . . let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is

need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:25-32).

The scriptures are clear that while anger is a natural, holy emotion, the Body of Christ manages anger through relationship building, holy conversation and forgiveness. As the Body of Christ, we will practice those disciplines (they can be far more challenging than just getting angry, can't they?) as a church family, because "*we are members of one another,*" and the way we care for one another, even in these uncertain times, is an act of faith and a witness to our neighborhood and world.

This new life in Christ, which Ephesians refers to, is unnatural, uncomfortable, and upside down to so many of the images that we see on television and on the internet. We had to be washed by baptism to imagine it, we have to worship to remember it, we have to practice it together to realize it—because we have been forgiven in Christ, we can do it!

See you in church on Sunday!

Rev. Amy L. Gearhart,  
Senior Pastor

