

“A Room with a View”

August 12, 2012

Rev. David Duquette

Ephesians 4:26 (NRSV) Be angry but do not sin. That’s easier said than done. It’s no sin to be angry, but when we are angry, we are vulnerable to the devil’s wiles. When we’re angry, we can create hell on earth in God’s name, but it doesn’t have to be that way. When we were baptized, we were *sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption*, the day when “*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*”

Last week, we renewed our faith by asking Jesus for a slice of life. We recommitted ourselves to Jesus Christ. *Ephesians 4:26 (NRSV) Be angry but do not sin* invites us to renew our commitment to Pennside Presbyterian Church, our commitment to be the Church, the body of Christ, our commitment to be “a sign, foretaste, and instrument” of the reign of God here and now on earth. Rather than making room for the devil, Paul invites us to imitate God; to love as Christ loved, and for God’s sake offer this world that God loves so much a room with a view.

① ROOM FOR THE DEVIL

Anger is everywhere! Get in your car, turn on talk radio and listen to them yell. When you arrive home, turn on the TV and watch them yell. Go online and OMG! “It only takes a spark to get a fire going!” The blogosphere lights up at the least little thing as anger begets anger. “I’m outraged at your outrage!”

Last Sunday, anger demonstrated its demonic potential, when a lone gunman, linked to various hate groups, opened fire in a Sikh temple, killing 6 people and injuring more. Throughout the week, we learned that the shooter was involved with various white supremacist groups. We also learned that “since 9/11 the Sikh Coalition has recorded over 700 instances of discrimination and bias including “everything from violent hate crime to employment discrimination, profiling at the airport or school bullying.””

This tragedy on the heels of the shooting in Aurora, CO, demonstrates the damage anger can produce; anger inspires hate which generates violence.

Anger is everywhere. It permeates our culture. It divides the Church. We separate into groups who are pro-this and anti-that. We choose sides and wage war on one another; not a war with guns and ammo but a war of words.

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Brothers and sisters, it ought not to be so, but the New Testament witness is that it is often so. Most of the New Testament is comprised of letters written by early church leaders like Peter, Paul, and John; in general, they wrote to address divisions and conflict in the early church. They all urged the early church in one way or another, *Ephesians 4:26–27 (NRSV) Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.*

It is no sin to be angry; anger does not necessarily lead to hate and violence or to conflict and division; anger does not necessarily lead to these things, but it often does, so when we are angry, Paul urges us to examine ourselves and ask the pointed question: Are we making room for the devil?

Here are some warning signs that our anger has crossed the line and we are making room for the devil:

1. Can we express our anger graciously? Do our words rise to this high standard? *Ephesians 4:29 (NRSV) 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.*
2. Is our anger timely? Are we angry about a current event or are we dwelling in the past and recalling a record of wrongs to keep our fire burning? *Ephesians 4:26 (NRSV) Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger. 1 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV84) [Love] is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.*
3. Can we feel anything other than anger? Can we be thankful, joyful, for the many blessings God gives us? Can we love one another, or are we so consumed with anger that we cannot feel anything else?
4. Can we remain in relationship with people who disagree with us? Can we cross party lines with a cup of coffee and for a few moments, *Ephesians 4:31–32 (NRSV) 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.*

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These are all common sense suggestions, but common sense is often the first thing we lose when we are angry. We make room for the devil and find it difficult if not impossible to make room in our hearts for anyone, especially our brother and sister in Christ, with whom we disagree.

It is no sin to be angry, but when you are angry, you are vulnerable to the devil’s wiles. Beware anger! Be aware of your anger! Pay attention to it; to what you say and what you do when you are angry. *Ephesians 4:26–27 (NRSV) Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.*

② A Room with a View

Anger is everywhere. We are surrounded by it. Sometimes we are filled with it. What do we do with it? Where do we go with it? How do we overcome the devil’s temptation to define ourselves by our differences?

Paul’s admonition to not let the sun go down on our anger points to a particularly dangerous form of anger – unresolved anger. We get angry about something, but we do not deal with it. It weighs on our hearts. It festers in our souls. It metastasizes into something dark and ugly that lurks in the depths of our spirits waiting for the opportunity to lash out and find satisfaction.

Have you ever been in a towering rage with no idea why? Sure, what happened was irritating, and it would be appropriate to be bothered by it, but your anger is way out of proportion in comparison with what happened.

If this has happened to you, then you have experienced the power of unresolved anger. The gift these experiences give us is the opportunity to discern what these deep wounds are so that we can begin to heal them.

We Presbyterians believe that this kind of discernment occurs in a group setting. It’s why we have so many committees. We believe that “truth is in order to goodness” and that truth, especially the truth about ourselves, is best discovered in a community of faith.

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Anger can divide communities of faith if we let it; if we allow room to be made for the devil, but Paul urges us to make a room with a view: *Ephesians 5:1–2 (NRSV) ... be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

We create a room with a view by imitating God’s example: God loves us. God loves the person/people we are angry with. God never gives up on us, no matter how deeply our disobedience wounds Him. That’s the view that makes room. Yes, we are angry, but the person we are angry with is not our enemy; they are our brother and sister in Christ, a beloved child of God.

The tragic events of past few weeks demonstrate how important it is for the Church to offer the world a room with a view. We are losing our ability to disagree without being disagreeable. We are called to counter that trend; to be “a sign, foretaste, and instrument of the reign of God” in this world by offering safe space for men and women to build community with people with whom they disagree. Here we cross party lines. Here we speak with and listen to points of view that are different from our own. Here we have genuine dialogues that foster mutual understanding rather than a collision of world views. Here we love one another because the love of God that unites us in Christ is greater than anything that may divide us.

Ephesians 4:26–27 (NRSV) Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Do not indulge in the kind of anger that divides us one from another; anger that destroys community for the sake of the cause. Imitate God. See yourself and the person you are angry with as the beloved child of God you are! Live in love, and Pennside Presbyterian Church will be “a sign, foretaste, and instrument of the reign of God” in this world. We’ll offer the world a room with a view. Amen.