

March 14, 2018

The Seven Deadly Sins
The Deadly Sin of Wrath
Jonah 4:1-4

Opening words: Lent is a time of spiritual renewal. It is a time to rediscover the person God intended you to be from the very beginning. It is not just a time to identify your sins, it is a time to take steps to eliminate your sins. Never forget it, we live in the shadow of John Wesley. He told us we should always be striving toward perfection. With that in mind, on Ash Wednesday, I began this sermon series, *The Seven Deadly Sins*. On that evening I preached a sermon called *Taking Sin Seriously*. Since that night, I have looked at lust, greed, gluttony, sloth, and pride. On Sunday, I am going to look at envy. This evening, I am going to look at wrath. Our scripture lesson is Jonah 4:1-4. Let me call this message *The Deadly Sin of Wrath*.

Jonah 4:1-4 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³ Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

⁴ But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Wrath has been defined as, *Extreme anger*. How can something so easily defined be so complex? That definition came from Webster. This definition comes from me: Wrath is when you are mad at God, because God's will trumped your will. If you are ready to begin, say, "**Amen!**"

Abraham Lincoln's secretary of war, Edwin Stanton, was once angered by an army officer who accused him of favoritism. Stanton complained to Lincoln, who suggested that Stanton write the officer a sharp letter. Stanton did, and showed the strongly worded message to the president. "What are you going to do with it?" Lincoln inquired. Surprised, Stanton replied, "Send it." Lincoln shook his head. "You don't want to send that letter," he said. "Put it in the stove and burn it. That's what I do when I have written a letter while I am angry. It's a good letter, and you had a good time writing it and you feel better. Now burn it and write another." I tell you this story for one reason. Everyone gets mad occasionally. It is almost as if we are hard-wired to get mad, occasionally.

I get mad occasionally. Our area has a great problem with drugs. Each one of us has known someone who has died from drugs. Several years ago, I was called upon to officiate at a funeral of one of the victims. She was a young woman, who had her entire life ahead of her. In her early thirties, she was suddenly gone. I met with her family

and closest friends; they were devastated. No one could look at me; no one could finish a sentence. I arrived early for the calling hours and sat in the back. I sat with a brother, who watched the mourners pass by her casket. A man walked in alone and walked up to the casket. Her brother looked at me and said, "There is the devil now." I just looked at him and he responded, "That is her drug dealer. He is the one who killed her." I didn't say anything, but I was mad. I get mad occasionally. I feel better when I think about the next line.

Jesus got mad occasionally too. You know the story. It was Holy Week and Jesus went to the temple to pray. The courtyard outside of the temple was filled with merchants. They were selling sacrifices to the people who had come for the Passover. The rich bought expensive sacrifices; the poor bought small sacrifices. It was a good money maker for the temple, and people were abused. Jesus saw what was happening. What is more important, Jesus knew what was happening. The Master knew the people were being victimized and he got mad. It has nothing to do with selling pepperoni rolls for the next youth mission trip. It has nothing to do with selling dinner tickets to exhaust the church debt. It has everything to do with people being victimized in the name of God. Jesus got mad, occasionally. We should not be surprised.

God gets mad occasionally. That is not my opinion. That is what the Bible tells us. Consider these Bible verses with me.

Ezekiel 25:17 I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebuke. Then they will know I am the Lord.

Colossians 3:6 For the wrath of the Lord is coming.

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed in heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness men.

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains in him.

There are other passages, but I will stop. The point is clear. Sometimes, God is angry.

Sometimes, we all get mad. It is as if we are hard-wired to get mad. Every day, we play the part of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. We do our best to show the world a calm exterior, but occasionally we explode with emotion. Usually, we all can hide our dark side, but occasionally it is exposed. The question is not, do you get mad? The answer is obvious. The answer is yes. If you will admit that sometimes you get mad, say, "**Amen!**" Being mad is nothing more than an emotional response to a perceived injustice. Being wrathful is when you are mad at God because his will trumps your will. That leads us to this evening's scripture lesson.

We find ourselves this evening in the Old Testament book of Jonah. The name Jonah means "dove," and it has been dated about the year 612 BC. Jonah was one of the twelve Minor Prophets. They are not considered minor because their message is not

important. They are considered minor because their message is brief. For generations, Jonah has been known as the "Reluctant Prophet." You know his story. God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh, but he refuses because he doesn't care for the Ninevites. Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah, the Reluctant Prophet, flees in the opposite direction. He heads in the opposite direction to Tarshish, which is present-day Spain. God is determined to send Jonah to Nineveh, so he sends a great storm, tossing the ship carrying Jonah in all directions. Fearing for their lives, the crew of the ship draws lots to find the guilty one. Jonah is exposed, and he is thrown into the Mediterranean Sea. His life is spared not by a whale, but by a great fish. Jonah prays for his life, and the great fish "vomits him out" on dry ground. Finally, Jonah goes to Nineveh and tells the people to repent. The good news is, the people do repent; the bad news is, Jonah is upset that they repented. The prophet is mad at God because he showed compassion on the Ninevites. He prays again and scolds God for his loving ways. When God heard his prayer, he asks Jonah the question for this evening, **"Have you any right to be angry?"** In other words, God is asking the prophet, why are you mad? Jonah is mad because God's will trumped his will. When was the last time you played the part of Jonah? When was the last time you were mad at God because God's will trumped your will? If you know of someone who is mad at God, then you know someone who is guilty of the deadly sin of wrath. If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

The Tretyakov Art Gallery is in Moscow, Russia. It is one of the finest art galleries in the world today. I have been fortunate to have been there several times. One of the paintings I long to see in the collection is entitled, *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on November 16, 1581*. That painting is a snapshot in history. I find the story interesting. Ivan the Terrible (1530-1584) is one of those great names in history. Politically successful, he both united and expanded Russia. Personally, he was a disaster. He struggled with each one of his family members, including his son, Ivan. On November 16, 1581, he was fighting with his son, Ivan, and flew into a rage. Picking up a blunt object, he struck Ivan in the head and killed him. Three years later, when Ivan the Terrible died, there was no adult son to succeed him, and Russia entered a period called "The Time of Troubles." Ivan the Terrible's wrath dismantled his life's work. It isn't just true of Ivan the Terrible.

It is true of us. It is true of anyone who is mad at God because God's will trumped their will. Do you know of anyone who is mad at God? Could it be you are mad at God? Do you remember the definition of wrath? It is, *extreme anger*. Wrath is one of the seven deadly sins. This is Lent, a time to repent. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**