

**Sixth Sunday after Epiphany, Year A**  
**Feb. 12, 2017**  
**St. James, Wheat Ridge**

By the Rev. Becky Jones

My goodness, that was a long gospel lesson.  
Covered a lot of ground, too.  
Jumps all over the place,  
from murder to adultery to divorce to swearing.  
Where to begin?

When confronted with a text like this,  
a preacher really only has two choices.  
You can attempt to address everything,  
which might be a bit much for a 12-minute homily.  
Or you can try to take one little bit of the text,  
and through it, try to shed some light on the larger message.

Today, I'm gonna focus on one little bit,  
that bit about dropping what you're doing –  
even if it's worshipping God –  
even if it's dropping your donation in the offering plate –  
putting that temporarily aside  
so that you can be about the even more important job of reconciliation,  
of restoring a broken relationship.

I tell you this now  
so you won't be sitting there for the next 10 minutes  
waiting for me to explain  
what Jesus meant about divorce  
or that thing about gouging your eye out  
and cutting off your hand.  
Those things are just gonna have to wait for another day.

So first, let's acknowledge that we are living in angry times.  
More people are angrier at more *other* people  
than at any time I can recall in my life.  
There's anger all over the TV.

And social media makes it possible for us to vent our anger directly onto our friends.

Who among us hasn't been tempted to "unfriend" someone on Facebook because we just get sick of their constant angry harangues.

Or maybe we've written people out of our lives because we just can't bear to be around them anymore, they make us so mad!

Don't get me wrong. Anger can be a good thing.

If it gets us out of our complacency and drives us to fight injustice, then that's a righteous anger and that's good.

Jesus got angry when he saw the temple being used by money changers to make a profit off poor worshippers.

That was a righteous anger.

Moses got angry when the people made a golden calf to worship instead of God.

That was a righteous anger.

And there's plenty of need for righteous anger in our society right now.

There's a lot we SHOULD be angry about.

The problem comes when we get so angry that we do harm.

When we get so angry that we become like the very thing we're fighting against.

And we abuse others.

And dehumanize them.

And purposely try to wound them.

And then try to justify what we've done.

The problem comes when we stay in a state of constant anger,

never letting that fiery emotion subside,

because really, it's only when we cool off

that we can begin to look for creative solutions to problems,

for fair, constructive ways to right injustices.

The problem comes when we let anger interfere with relationships.

Or maybe it isn't uncontrolled anger that wrecks a relationship.

Maybe the anger only flares for an instant.

But after that, pride takes over,

and so even though we're no longer burning with anger,

we can't bring ourselves to say we're sorry,

we can't take that first step toward reconciliation.

Our need to be angry at someone,  
our willingness to hold onto a grudge,  
flies in the face of Jesus's insistence  
that we develop within us a core of calmness,  
of steadiness,  
of serenity.

The ancient Greek mathematician Archimedes once said,  
"Give me a lever and a place to stand,  
and I will move the earth."  
He may have been talking about physics,  
but he could just as easily have been talking about human relationships.

If we can find that imperturbable place to stand within ourselves,  
then like Jesus, we can bless our enemies,  
and do good to those who hate us.  
We can forgive the one who has wronged us,  
or, harder still, we can seek forgiveness  
from those that we have wronged.

That's really the call of our gospel lesson today,  
even that eye gouging part.  
If we're to follow Jesus,  
we don't get to selfishly keep wallowing in our resentments.  
The fact that we didn't kill the so-and-so isn't good enough.  
No, we have to deal with our anger.  
We have to stop pretending that there's nothing wrong,  
and we have to deal with the real problems that crop up in human  
relationships.  
We have to be honest,  
and we have to be straightforward  
and we have to be humble.

And what's more, we have to do it now.  
We can't wait for a more convenient time.  
We can't wait for the right moment to come  
when we can mumble some trite face-saving words,  
but never really own up to our misdeeds.

We have to stop what we're doing, and change our ways right now.  
We have to straighten out our lives and our relationships right now.  
The Kingdom of God is at hand,  
and we have to live with Kingdom values right now.  
Not tomorrow.  
Not next week.  
Now.

And if we are willing to do that,  
to stand in that place,  
then the Spirit of God will hand us the lever we need to move the world.  
The love of Christ will give us the strength we need  
to make whatever changes have to be made,  
to repair whatever breaches have to be addressed.

If you think this sounds a lot like a 12-step program, you're right.  
It's actually steps 4 through 10.  
Make a searching and fearless moral inventory.  
Admit to God, to ourselves and to another person the exact nature of our  
wrongs.  
Be ready to have God remove these defects of character.  
Ask God to remove our shortcomings.  
Make a list of all the persons we have harmed, and make amends to them  
where possible.  
And continue to take that personal inventory,  
and when wrong, promptly admit it.

For Jesus, it's the first step. First, be reconciled.  
Then come back and work things out with God.

No more pretending.  
No more "alternate facts" that we tell ourselves to justify our behavior.  
The choice is ours, and we can choose life or we can choose death.  
Don't be afraid to choose life.  
Choose life, and God will be there,  
handing you the lever that you need  
to move the world.

Amen.

