

Being angry is like carrying a box of rocks around, a fairly big box with a whole pile of different sized stones of different weights. The box makes life just a little harder to live. And the longer you carry the box the more tired you get until you need to empty the box.

And to start with let me illustrate what can happen with the stones,

You see anger is carrying around potential violence, going around angry is like carrying a box of rocks or a box of bombs. Jesus said going around carrying a box of anger is not the way of discipleship. There are 4 things we can do with Anger. I've shown you 1, you can unleash it, generally bad but not always. 2. You can be very middle-class and suppress it. There are a lot of people going around with suppressed rage. 3. You can divert it – go and thump a boxing bag, but often in diverting anger someone else gets hurt. Or 4 you can deal directly with it. Which might look a lot like putting the box down, or putting down the stones one by one, and deciding to let go the anger. (We will come back to that.) What do you do?

I was talking to a friend last week about kids with ADHD, lovely kids but sometimes when they get wound up they enter a rage, and once they are in that rage, there is nothing you can do until it works itself out. It's a warning for all of us, that if we get to that point of rage, it can become uncontrollable also.

I can't talk about anger and not talk about Domestic Violence, and I'm going to talk about we; because in this community we have seen the most extreme action of domestic violence, we have seen exactly what Jesus warns of. If we go around carrying a box of rocks, the most likely place for that to come out is in our homes. In physical violence, or emotional violence – male on female and female on male. Anger and rage are dangerous, dangerous things. If you are carrying a box of rocks, decide today to do something about that.

If you are suffering domestic violence, decide today to make a change. Perhaps come and see me and I will get you help, I have friends who know how to help. And let's see real change before you ever consider ever going back

Well I'm talking you the 10 commandments and today we have got to commandments 6, you shall not kill, you shall not murder. We're going to have a look at the ancient context, a really good look at what Jesus said, and then we are going to come back to what about me? Because we have seen a man who's rage at not being able to control his wife, led him to murder her. This is real stuff guys. Let's not carry around a box of rocks.

Shall we revise the 10?

Number 6 do no rats-ach, do not kill, ratsach is an uncommon word in the OT, used 40 times, there are two other words harag 'kill, slay, destroy' used 160 times "Muth" ;cause to die, kill' used 200 times for killing. Ratsach is always about people it's never about animals, it's never used of war, and only once used in the context of capital punishment, where it is used in a couplet, someone who kills someone shall themselves be killed.

So Philosophically we can talk about war and the death penalty, but these valid arguments don't come from the Decalogue. With respect, it is a mistranslation to say that the 10 commandments ban killing in warfare, they do not.

Do not murder is a good translation, however the word does cover unintentional killing, what we would call manslaughter. It seems that the word might have had a background in blood feud and might have had a connection with anger violence. (I'm cautious about this because it is so convenient to my

argument.) But simply put you shall not kill another member of the covenant community. There are cultures where the powerful kill and no one can stop them, but that is not to be so in Israel. This command from Yahweh is the very foundation of a civil society, we don't go around killing each other.

And in Israel this applied within the community, this applied between families and between tribes, you don't just go and kill someone from the Tribe of Judah. Now you might ask did that apply to members of other communities, well firstly the sojourner, the stranger staying with you is definitely included. 'You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brethren or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns' Deut 24.14. Next remember the story of the bible is the gradual moving out of the Vision of God's Kingdom, from the family, to the tribe, to Israel altogether, and then increasingly the Prophets Vision that all the nations of the world belonged to the Lord, and so the requirements of God's law kept getting wider and wider. There seems to be a widespread acceptance that Israelites didn't just go and kill members of other nations, they only did so in times of war. Now Holy War is a massive topic not for today, but we can see in Isaiah's Vision the intention of God that his Kingdom would spread universally and bring Peace.

In the sermon on the mount, probably the most famous sermon of all time, delivered by Jesus to his followers near Capernaum Jesus talks about the law of Moses, he talks about continuity, how he hasn't come to remove the law – but also dis-continuity, and expands on the Decalogue.

Jesus said you have heard it said to the people long ago, he's referring to Moses, the verse we read and then Ex 21.12 – '*anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death*'. What Jesus does, is he then traces the source of murder and describes it as anger in the heart, he looks to the internal. Now he doesn't say hatred, which he could have, and in fact hatred is included, he says *angry at his brother*. Focused anger. Now on the surface it looks like there is an escalation, however from what I've read that is more rhetorical, the offences are all the same, but the penalty does escalate. The point is that holding onto anger and verbalising it endangers you in the same way that murder does.

Angry with his brother, now in Jewish culture it was less common to insult people, and *raca* basically means idiot, the Hebrew word is untranslated in the text, it must have been a well-known insult. And fool is a similar word, so the ideas are similar and Jesus escalates the penalty. To be subject to judgement would be by the little local Sanhedrin 23 people in a city – but they carried the death penalty, answerable to the Sanhedrin implies the big Sanhedrin – the big council in Jerusalem with 71 members and then the third escalation is the Ghennena, the valley of Hinnon which was where in the ancient past there were human sacrifices to Molech and now was a rubbish dump, it symbolised hell on earth and it was symbolic of divine judgement. District court, high court, Supreme court.

Again the point is that Jesus is drawing a connection between harbouring anger, nursing wrath, abusing your brother with words and the spirit of murder. It is as if Jesus is saying to us, deal with it in your heart before it erupts in violence.

Now the next 2 things he says relate to a brother and an adversary; within the community and outside the community.

First if you are taking your offering to the temple and you remember your brother has something against you. I guess that means you are in the wrong. I've always read it the other way. Good to read carefully eh. I wonder whether Jesus meant that you were causing your brother to be angry?

Notice what is most significant. Leave your gift there. This is a matter of urgency. If you have wronged someone, go and try to sort it out. Reconciliation is easier if the person you are angry at comes seeking

forgiveness. I've preached a number of times about forgiving people when they don't deserve it and they won't ask. It is easier to let your anger go when someone comes with a genuine apology.

Last year I started the year with a little mantra something like, be quick to apologise and fast to forgive. In friendships, marriages and families – when someone comes to you with a genuine apology, especially if they will let you vent a little, it is easier to forgive. I'm not talking about the big things.

So Jesus' first example, if you are coming up for communion today and there is someone in the church that you know is angry with you, during the passing the peace time, why don't you go and say I'm sorry. I'll encourage all of us to mix around. Don't go into detail, just help your brother or sister to forgive. If there is someone who is not here, don't miss communion, but go to them as soon as you can. This is not an altar this is a table full of humility.

Now the second example is similar, an outsider is angry with you and taking you to court, it sounds like you are in the wrong. Make peace first. Or you will be thrown into debtor's jail. Now the Jews didn't operate a debtor's jail, so this is implying outsiders, perhaps Romans. Now notice the idea. If you are in the wrong and are convicted, or perhaps like in some parts of the world, you might not even be in the wrong. But make peace quickly. Because if you are thrown into Jail someone will have to buy your way out, probably your parents, your brother, or your wife and kids. This is where the idea of redemption in the bible comes from. The cost of getting you free is what needs to be paid, and that is one of the metaphors for the cross. On the cross Jesus paid the cost of getting you free.

Again who is paying for your anger, your family. If you are holding onto anger, who is paying for it? Your family. If you are angry at someone else, who pays for it, often their family.

When we think of the 6th Commandment do not murder, I encourage you to think of what leads to murder. Yes, there are unexplained killings but in the most part Jesus is tracing murder back to anger in the heart.

So what can we do about the box of rocks that we can carry called anger. Firstly, we can see where anger comes from, sometimes anger comes from people crossing our boundaries and the answer then is to look at strengthening our boundaries. To learn to be assertive rather than angry.

When someone tries to give us a rock, perhaps by an unrealistic expectation, let the rock fall to the ground as it is not ours.

The second thing that we can do is to divert our anger, sometimes when we are full of adrenalin, angry or anxious the best thing to do is go for a long run. To go out to the beach and yell at God about how we feel, God is safe and he can take it, to disperse our anger in safe ways. This is not ideal, but it's better than just putting another rock in the box and trying to force down the lid.

And thirdly we can let go of our anger, this is a prayerful activity, to confess our anger and to forgive the sources of our anger. If I'm angry that my friend didn't do something, I need to forgive and to let go; not to do the task for them, that tends to make the anger worse, but just to leave whatever it is undone.

If you think about anger, it's easy to nurse it, to go over it, I know what it is to repeat my anger. Do you know how to nurse your anger? Then you have a starting place for how to release your anger. That means I know what it would be like to set it down, to consciously say NO. It will not be simple, yet I can.

This is the Key task, to learn how to let go of anger, and I want to suggest there are two keys to letting go. 1 is urgency, Jesus gives a real sense of urgency – this stuff is poison. In Ephesians Paul says don't

let the sun go down on your anger. Let it go the conscious decision with God's help to lay anger down. The bible talks about it.

The second thing is to ask God to quench your anger, if it's like a fire to put it out; if it is like a box of rocks give him the rocks, pass them over to him.

How do we release anger, forgive, put down, quench, let go, breathe out? There are 100 ways to let go anger, and for you it might mean getting some counselling advice or some prayer. All I can emphasise today is to let go of anger with some urgency.

Amen.