

*Reflect and Connect:* Think about a time you were angry, and your anger gave you motivation to change something. We'll take a few moments just to think, then I will invite you to share your thoughts with someone near you.



When I was growing up, my favorite author was Madeleine L'Engle. She was a writer of books for youth and adults, whose writing was informed by her deep Christian faith.

My favorite book was *A Wrinkle in Time*

In the story, teenage Meg Murray goes on a journey through space to rescue her father from the evil force which holds him.

She is guided by three supernatural beings – Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Which, and Mrs. Who.

Recently, I've been reminded of a particular moment in the book "Stay angry, little Meg, Mrs. Whatsit whispered. You will need all your anger now." In the story, Meg's anger gives her the motivation, the drive to keep going against all odds, against It – capital I – the huge danger and evil that holds her father and then her brother hostage. And when she comes face to face with the It, she realizes that the one thing she has that It doesn't have is love. She rescues her father and her brother with the power of her love, and her anger.



Today we read a gospel story in which Jesus gets angry. He doesn't just get angry – he acts on his anger. It's not completely clear to us why he is angry.

We know that the sellers and money changers were necessary for the people coming to the Temple from far and wide for the observance of Passover. But they have transgressed some boundary, crossed some line – perhaps by carrying out their trade on the temple grounds, perhaps because they are enriching themselves at the expense of other worshipers.

John isn't clear about the why.

But the disciples recognize that Jesus acts out of his zeal – his passion – for the temple and the worship that happens there.

Jesus acts in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets, who had harsh words for anyone who went through the motions of ritual worship but didn't have love of God and neighbor in their hearts.

The prophets called out injustice when they saw it,  
and warned of the consequences of neglecting  
the poor and vulnerable people in their communities.  
They reminded kings and communities that care for one another  
was not just an option for the people of God, but a requirement.



This story may make us uncomfortable,  
as prophets often do.  
Because many of us – especially the women –  
have been taught that it is not okay to be angry.  
We have been taught that good Christians are always nice, never get angry,  
never hurt feelings or engage in confrontation.  
We have been taught that anger is a failure of love.

Yet we are angry.  
We are angry, and we are uncomfortable with being angry.  
We are angry, and we feel guilty. Less faithful.

So I want to say that I believe the idea that anger is not Christian is wrong.  
Is actually completely backwards.  
I have come to believe that sometimes anger is the only appropriate,  
loving response to injustice and harm.

When I was in seminary, I came across an essay by womanist theologian Beverly  
Wildung Harrison, called the Power of Anger in the Work of Love.  
The very fact that I remember the name of the author and the essay  
tells you what a great impact it had on me.  
A womanist theologian does theology from the perspective of women of color –  
writing at the intersection of sexism and racism in religion and church.  
I had never heard an argument such as the one Harrison makes,  
that anger is actually a response of love  
to a situation that harms oneself or others.  
It was a revelation.

As I explored this topic on the internet this week,  
I came across a sermon by Mennonite pastor Sherie Hostetler from 2024, in  
which she also remembers reading Harrison's article in seminary.  
She writes,

*When I was a seminary student, I read an essay called "The Power of Anger  
in the Work of Love." That essay said a lot of great things, but what has  
stuck with me for 35 years is the title itself and the wisdom it conveys to us.*

*Anger is a natural response when boundaries are transgressed. When we are invalidated or abused or when people or creatures or places that we love are abused. Anger is, simply, a boundary — a no arising from within us — telling us that something must be protected, that something is not right.*

*Being a woman from an Amish-Mennonite background, I was taught pretty much from birth to suppress my anger. But it's not just me — so many of us are. And it's true that, like fire, anger can either transform or destroy. The unskillful use of anger can destroy relationships.*

*But, as Harrison says, "suppressed anger robs us of the power to love, the power to act... we need to celebrate anger's rightful place within the work of love." Anger is not the opposite of love, she says, but a sign that all is not "well in the world around us and that injustice needs to be addressed."*

*If we shut down our anger when boundaries have been violated, we empower those who wrong us, who wrong others. If we shut down our anger when boundaries have been violated, we diminish the prophetic spark within us that can empower us to take action for the good.*

A few weeks ago we talked about anger, and our struggle with anger,  
in the Thursday Bible study, and I realized that I needed to preach about it.  
I needed to preach about anger after hearing from so many friends  
in Chicago and Minneapolis about the struggles they are facing —  
and also about the resistance clergy and people of faith are making  
to abuses of ICE in their communities.  
It is in the prophetic tradition of our faith to get angry at injustice,  
and to call it out, and to work tirelessly for justice.



Six decades ago, the civil rights movement drew people from around the country to support their demonstrations and marches —  
people moved by love of neighbor  
and anger at the racial injustice they witnessed.  
They used their anger, not to lash out, meeting violence with violence  
and hate with hate —  
but in nonviolent protest, in solidarity  
centered in the belief that justice could prevail.

On March 8, 1965, as state violence was unleashed against Black citizens in Selma, Martin Luther King, Jr wrote a telegram to clergy across the nation, calling them to come to Selma to be part of the protests. He wrote,  
*In the vicious maltreatment of defenseless citizens of Selma, where old women and young children were gassed and clubbed at random, we have witnessed an eruption of the disease of racism which seeks to destroy all of*

*America. No American is without responsibility. All are involved in the sorrow that rises from Selma to contaminate every crevice of our national life. The people of Selma will struggle on for the soul of the nation, but it is fitting that all America help to bear the burden.*

This year our remembrance of Martin Luther King Jr has a particular resonance,  
as we come again to a moment of moral crisis.

We are facing such a time in our nation now,  
witnessing the terrorizing and detention of immigrants and people of color,  
and the use of targeted violence against protestors who stand in solidarity.

Witnessing the dismantling of social systems of support and care.

Witnessing attacks on the civil rights of our LGBTQ siblings.

Witnessing the use and threat of violence at the service of empire.

It is a time when people of faith are called to respond  
with prophetic voice and action.

We need to be angry.

We need to use our anger for the power of love –

to stand up for our neighbors who are targeted by hate  
to support our neighbors who don't have adequate food, shelter and health care.  
We need to speak and act on behalf of a God who desires abundant life for all.

I close with a blessing for a time such as this:

*(slide)* May God bless you with discomfort,  
at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships  
so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger  
at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,  
so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

*(slide)* May God bless you with tears,  
to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war,  
so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness  
to believe that you can make a difference in the world,  
so that you can do what others claim cannot be done,  
to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

Amen