

Psalm 22:1-15

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.

To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people.

All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

“Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver— let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”.

Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.

On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint;

my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;

my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.*

Permission to Scream - October 10, 2021

Psalm 22:1-15

Have you ever been angry? Of course. We have all been angry. The causes of our anger are many and they are varied. We get angry at our workplaces. We get angry at our partners, our parents, our children. We get angry about our neighbors and friends. We get angry about the world.

At the ongoing Congressional hearings into the Facebook app, it was revealed by Facebook's own research that the angrier the posts and content make people, the longer they will stay on. In other words, anger makes money. Anger feeds anger. It's almost like a drug. There's something about feeling angry that paradoxically makes us feel pleasure and if we feel pleased by anger, we want more of it, more of it, and even more of it.

Christianity is a religion based fundamentally on love. Jesus commanded us just two things: Love God, and love our neighbors as ourselves. Otherwise, he told us explicitly to ignore and even accept the anger and hatred others thrust at us. Jesus consuls, again and again, that if someone strikes you on the cheek, offer him the other as well. If someone wants your coat, give him your cloak as well. Love your enemies. Forgive those who do wrong to you.

Jesus' advice is not at all satisfactory to those who want revenge. He rejects the idea that we should return evil for evil.

And frankly, that is something most people, even those who call themselves Christians, have a hard time accepting.

After all, as human beings, how do we feel when life hurts us? Of course, we want to hurt back! We want to see punishment! We want to see justice! And if the system can't give the punishment and the justice we think is appropriate then we want to take the law into our own hands and make sure we get what we are craving.

Once we have been angered, we need to feel some sort of release. We need to feel like our cries have been answered, our needs have been met. We want to have some sort of resolution so we can move on and put the past behind us.

So we persuade ourselves that anger and revenge are so much more preferable to forgiveness and love. Look at your own lives. What people, what situations have caused and are still causing you to be upset? Who or what is going on that you can't let go of? What names, what words, what triggers are sufficient to ruin your day and crash your world down around you?

Yes, that's anger. That's anger that just won't die. That's anger that Jesus cannot penetrate. That's anger which for some keeps them alive.

And that's a problem, isn't it? Our Christian faith proclaims an ideal way of life and living in which we are encouraged to replace our feelings of anger and hatred with feelings of love and acceptance instead. When we talk about Jesus what do we say? He was human like we are but did not sin. He was accused

unfairly of all kinds of crimes he didn't commit. He was sentenced to death for no reason. He suffered a painful death on a cross. Yet, our Scriptures tell us that when he was on the cross, Jesus forgave those who commanded his death and the many who were making fun of him as he died. We believe God committed the greatest act of forgiveness of all by raising Jesus from the dead and allowing him to continue his ministry of love and acceptance in spite of human beings killing him.

Love, forgive. Love, forgive. Love, forgive. I know, you know, we know that is what we are supposed to be all about. But what if we just can't? What happens when we are so consumed in the moment by our passions that we cannot let go — at least right now?

We have all been told, "Time heals all wounds." And perhaps that is true. Certainly for most of us, the things that angered us twenty years ago do not have the same impact, the same effect on us now that they did back then. If nothing else, the old things we used to hate have been replaced by new things to hate. We can only hate so many things at the same time, can't we? Our capacity for hate and anger is limited. So old hates and old angers yield to new ones. I guess that's one way time heals our wounds.

But is there another option. On the one hand, it seems Jesus teaches us to give up our hate, give up our anger, and allow love and forgiveness to flow in and take over. On the other hand, we can live our lives in perpetual hatred and anger, always seething against the people and the situations which we think have hurt us. One way, the way of love, seems almost impossible to do. The other way, the way of hate, seems hard to sustain. What else can we do?

The answer, friends is simple and paradoxical at the same time. It is an answer found in the scriptures themselves. It is an answer you may have even considered but rejected. Here it is:

When we are angry, when we are full of hate, when we want revenge, don't direct those feelings at others. At the same time, don't direct those feelings at yourself. In other words, don't feel guilty or bad for being angry and full of hate.

But if we can't direct our feelings at the object of our hatred and we can't direct our feelings at ourselves, where do we direct our feelings?

As the psalmist teaches us, when we are angry, when we are full of hate, the only place to direct our feelings is at God.

God? Yes, God? The creator? Yes, the creator. In our three passages of scripture today, God makes it clear that God wants to be the object of our anger and that is OK.

What did the psalmist write? What is the first line of Psalm 22? "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?"

Let's think about this. Amazing, isn't it? Amazing that a human being should write these words. Even more amazing that they should be preserved and passed down for future generations to read. You see, the author of this complaint, the person who is expressing his anger, is none other than King David. David, the ancestor of Jesus.

You bet David was angry when he said these words when he expressed his anger at God. David was in big trouble. God had called him to be King of Israel, but instead of sitting in a palace, David found himself fleeing — a man on the run. David had no kingdom, he had only enemies trying to kill him. He believed God had called him to be king, but where was God? David was angry because he risked everything on obeying God and living the right way, but the God he was counting on was nowhere to be seen. What he was believing when he wrote those words is not that he would be king, but that he was about to die and it was all God's fault! And really, I think David was entirely justified in his anger.

Do the words, "My God, My God, why have you forgotten me?" Sound familiar? They should. These are the same words Jesus screamed out as he was hanging on the cross, being mocked by the crowds. Jesus, Son of God, dying painfully and terribly on the cross. Yes, he knew his death had been coming, he had predicted it several times. But now he was experiencing death and suffering and pain first hand and he was angry. And he wasted no time in doing exactly what David did and blame God.

Yes, I'm telling you the truth: Jesus was angry with God. Jesus yelled at God.

We also read from the Book of Job today. Here is another man angry with God. We discussed his story last week. Job was a blameless man who in a very short time lost his family, lost his wealth, and even lost his good health. Everything that mattered to him disappeared and Job was confused and Job was angry.

But here's the thing: Job was angry with God. David was angry with God. Jesus was angry with God. Job, David, and Jesus are all recorded as expressing their anger at God. And you may well be asking yourself, how can this be? How is it possible to get angry at God? These three examples are being presented to us as examples of how to relate to God. Could it be that if Job can be angry and David can be angry, and even Jesus can be angry with God, can you and I also be angry with God?

The answer, friends, is yes, very much yes. You and I, we have permission to scream at God.

Let's digest that statement for a bit. We have permission to scream at God. I know that some of you may be hearing this idea with shock. How can such a thing be possible? I mean God is God and we are just dust in the wind. How can an ant shout at an elephant? I mean, if we dare shout at God, doesn't that mean we are rejecting our faith? If we yell out, doesn't that mean we hate God? If God hears our complaints, won't God reject us and never listen to us again?

Some of you may feel that if we dare yell at God then we are renouncing our faith? Are we rejecting our belief? Are we saying that we don't believe this stuff?

No. Quite the contrary. When we choose to direct our anger not at others, not ourselves, but instead at God, our choice is actually a powerful way of confirming our faith in God!

How we reject our faith is when we stop conversing with God. When we stop praying. When we quit church. When we ignore scripture. When we choose to follow our own way. That is when faith dies. That is us rejecting God. That is us shutting down.

Instead, getting angry with God is actually a wonderful and powerful way of connecting with God. Far from rejecting God, to yell, scream, get really and truly ticked off can express our faith better than any other way we can!

Why? How? Because to be angry at God means that fundamentally there is someone to be angry at! If we don't believe God exists, or is so remote that God doesn't care, then why waste our time and our breath venting our anger? We might as well shout at our dishwashers!

But Job totally believed that God was there and was listening. He was enraged at God, but he never doubted that if he could lay his case to God, if he could explain his position, if he could ask why, then God would surely answer him.

David trusted God to be with him. After all, it was on faith that he believed he had been chosen king of Israel while just a boy. It was on faith that he went up and challenged Goliath with just a slingshot and stones. And it was on faith that he kept fighting and fleeing even as Saul was pursuing him with the entire army. David was angry, he was confused. He no doubt asked himself that if God had chosen him as king then why was he hiding in the wilderness? But David felt in his heart that he could yell at the God who was responsible for his terrible condition and was not afraid to express his feelings as boldly as he could.

And we come to Jesus, who quoted David's words while hanging on a cross. Jesus knew from the start of his ministry that he was going to be killed for preaching the truth. Jesus knew his message of unconditional love was too much for the world to bear. But it is a far cry from intellectually knowing one's fate to experiencing the pain and suffering in the flesh. Yet, Jesus was not afraid to cry out. He never felt he was giving up on his faith. He never felt he was renouncing his mission by screaming at God. He was utterly confident that when he spoke to his God, God was certainly listening.

That, friends, is where we can be in our relationship with God. There is no reason, absolutely no reason why we should ever fear screaming at God. Things are tough right now — harder than they have ever been for many of us. We face so many questions, so much uncertainty. So many institutions and traditions on which we have based our lives are crumbling away and we don't know what will replace them.

So do we hide? Do we shut down? Do we pretend that everything is all right?

No, no, one thousand times no. Right now is the time for anger. Right now is the time for all the pain, all the questions, all the confusion, all the disappointment, all the betrayal, all of it — to well up from deep inside our souls and spring forth to God in one massive release of pain directed at God. There is no need, in fact no reason, to keep it in.

God will hear us and God will love us just as God loved Job and David and Jesus and you.

If you've been waiting for permission to scream, you've got it.

Now, just do it.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.