Living faithfully … with anger
Martin Grove United Church
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Based on James 1:17-27 and Matthew 23:23-28, 37-38

Who here remembers the 2015 movie, "Inside Out".

[slide: "cast" of *Inside Out*]

After years of producing movies mainly designed to be humorous, Pixar made an attempt at making a movie that speaks to the rational side of our emotional side. Even if you don't know the movie, you certainly know the characters because they live inside all of us - from left to right - anger, fear, joy, disgust, sadness. The movie depicts two parallel adventures. On the outside, Riley - an 11 year old girl - faces the challenges of moving across the country with her family, being uprooted and being forced to find a new "home". And on the inside - meaning inside Riley herself - we have the story of how Riley was driven by her emotions. Literally driven, because Riley's emotions took turns running the controls that controlled Riley.

[slide: anger at the controls]

For example, here's "anger" at the controls while disgust watches. The movie depicts the interplay between emotions, memories, and real life.

[slide: "cast" of inside out]

But back to the cast. Do you notice anything about the cast as a group? We will get back to that. But first, how many emotions are there anyway? In the 4th Century, Aristotle identified 14 core emotions for humans: fear, confidence, anger, friendship, calm, enmity, shame, shamelessness, pity, kindness, envy, indignation, emulation, and contempt. Modern scientists have done 2 things with that list. Some researchers have broken the emotions down to an even finer level, and have cataloged over 100 emotions. But most contemporary research pegs the number of core human emotions at 4. Happiness, sadness, fear, and anger. Or if you want something memorable, you have to make it rhyme, so you could have "glad, sad, mad, and afrad", like they taught me during my clinical pastoral education. On that scale, the movie *Inside Out* has 1 extra emotion,

because fear and disgust are from the same core emotion.

But whether we use the 5 emotions from the movie, or the 4 emotions from modern psychology, what do you notice about the collective group of emotions? In both systems, there is 1 "positive" emotion, and all other emotions are "negative". In the movie, only joy is a "positive" emotion, while anger, fear, disgust and sadness are seen as "negative".

Given the huge range of human emotions - why do you think it is that we only see 1 positive emotion? Are you happy to imagine that almost all emotions are considered "negative"? In fact, I fell into this trap myself recently. I decided that I should put on a short sermon series this summer, focusing on pressing issues for many people. And I had 3 weeks. And I selected "living faithfully with …" and then selected fear, anger, and disappointment. So without even thinking about it I picked the 3 negative emotions myself. I guess that's just human nature! And of course, it is true that many people spend much of their lives dealing with fear, anger, and sadness.

In spite of its familiarity, anger is a funny emotion. There are many reasons why people feel anger of course. But research suggests that there are 2 types of anger. And you can tell the difference by how long the anger lasts. Sometimes people say that another person makes them angry, but that's only partly true. You can make a person angry by a spontaneous action. For example, if you hit someone, you can make them instantly angry. Emotions in this sense can be "caused" by other people. But there's a catch. Which is that if someone causes an emotion within you and you are still feeling that emotion after 90 seconds, then you are sustaining the emotion yourself. Another person can cause you to be angry right now, but 90 seconds from now if you are still angry, then you are making yourself - or at least keeping yourself - angry.

Sounds crazy, right? Why would someone want to make themselves angry? Actually, there are many logical reasons people choose to make themselves angry. Perhaps not good reasons, but logical reasons. I don't know if you've ever experienced this yourself, but sometimes, other people upset us. Sometimes we get upset because people do or say something that reminds us of our own faults, our own impotence, our own insecurities, our own limitations. And when that happens, one very natural way to

react is with anger. Because in our society, anger looks strong. We often think of angry people as in control and strong, believing that nobody gets the best of them. Which is funny really. Because if someone is hiding from their true emotions, that's not a sign of strength, it's a sign of weakness.

Consider this: Think back to a time in your life when you felt peaceful and calm. Perhaps it was recent, or perhaps you need to put your mind further back. But think of how you felt being at peace with yourself. And are you a powerful person? No. Are you a ridiculously wealthy person? No. And yet, you have the strength within to find peace of mind. Now keep that image in your mind as you compare yourself with another person whose photo I will show in a moment. This person is ridiculously wealthy. This person has been called the most powerful person on earth. And yet, do you think he honestly knows what peace of mind looks like?

[slide: Donald Trump angry pose]

Donald Trump thinks that anger is a sign of strength. However, he - like all bullies - is really a scared little boy that is afraid of his real emotions so he hides behinds his anger. So if *you* know what true inner peace is like, you are more powerful than Donald Trump. Keep that in mind this week.

Like it or not, in our society, it's not seen as OK to display fear, insecurity, or lack of self-worth, but if you just hide those feelings behind a mask of anger, now it's socially acceptable. That belief leads us to hide our own emotions - even from ourselves, which is not very healthy.

When you feel anger - don't deny it. According to psychologist Ricky Pond, "People who are better at categorizing their emotions into specific categories are more in tune with their emotions" and that leads to better peace of mind. That's not a license to act out your anger of course, but denial is not the answer. Instead, just be honest with yourself about your anger, wait 90 seconds, and then respond with your own authentic self.

When I imagined a sermon series on emotions, with a single sermon focused on anger, I had lots of ideas of how to start off. But I did not expect it to be so difficult to turn the corner in the middle and connect anger to readings from Scripture. But in truth,

it is. There are simply not a lot of stories about healthy anger in the Bible.

We do we see anger depicted in the Bible of course. For example, in Exodus 32, Moses comes down from the mountain with the 10 commandments and the people he had left were having a big party. The text says, "Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain." And a bit later, Moses commanded the sons of Levi, "put your sword on your side, each of you! Go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill your brother, your friend, and your neighbour", "… and about three three thousand of the people died that day." And in the end, instead of apologizing for his immature outburst, Moses tells the murderers that, "Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the Lord." I'm always left wondering how Moses felt when he realized - if he ever did - that he was angry because the people broke God's laws before Moses had even delivered those laws to the people.

And we have 2 stories of Jesus being angry. One story is what we call the "cleansing of the temple", when Jesus upset the tables in the outer courts of the temple where "temple" goods were sold to pilgrims. The anger here is a bit hard to understand. Pilgrims travelled a long way to visit the temple, and appreciated that they could locally purchase the items they needed for ritual sacrifice. The vendors were a part of the whole pilgrimage system. And yes, Jesus objected to the process.
[slide: Jesus cleansing the temple]

But we do have the story I just read from Matthew, where Jesus lambastes the Jewish leaders for pushing religious traditions while ignoring the deeper meanings of those traditions. And in what I read after his outburst (possibly 90 seconds later) Jesus expresses his underlying emotion - fear that the people of Jerusalem just never listen to God and always kill the prophets that God sends to Jerusalem for the good of the people. Read that way, it's a great story about Jesus feeling fear, responding in anger, and later on reflecting on his feeling of fear that was actually driving his actions in the first place. That's a story of dealing with anger in a healthy way.

And within the Bible, we do have the larger picture of Jesus frequently talking about peace. Sometimes we get confused and think Jesus is speaking about peace as

opposed to war, but Jesus really was not political in that way. Jesus did not tackle the Roman Empire. Jesus criticized, but did not try to overthrow the Jewish authorities. When Jesus spoke about peace, he meant inner, emotional, spiritual peace. When Jesus referred to "The peace of God" Jesus was speaking about inner peace. And inner peace is about the farthest opposite there is to anger. So in the big picture, I believe that Jesus affirms inner peace, not anger.

So - can we live faithfully with anger? Yes, as long as we don't dwell there. When you feel anger, learn what you can from your own anger, and then move on to whatever helps you find inner peace.

[slide: Buddha on anger]

As the Buddha said, "You will not be punished for your anger. You will be punished by your anger." So learn what you can from your own anger - for 90 seconds - and them move on. Find your peace within. That is the peace of God.

Amen.