**Next Steps to Risk Taking Discipleship**

**Anchored in Hope: Next Steps in Service**

**Matthew 21:10-15**

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October 28, 2018

The world feels a little crazy right now − okay, maybe a lot crazy. It’s hard not to get depressed, or angry. Who’s with me? Who else is troubled by the events of this past year, this past month, or even this past week? Bombs are being sent through the mail, and the recipients are being blamed. Federal troops have been sent to our borders because there’s a group of poor gathered 1,000 miles away. A woman comes forward with an allegation of abuse, and the weight of the Department of Justice is directed toward her, not at the alleged perpetrator. People of color are in shock that our President used an emotionally charged racist term to describe himself. A house of worship was attacked. The residents of the Florida panhandle are devastated by Hurricane Michael, and yet they barely register on our country’s collective psyche because there’s so much dysfunction everywhere. Rights of LGBTQ people are being rolled back. Today, a synagogue, a house of worship, was attacked by a crazy gunman. Is anyone else angry? Is anyone else fed up? How do we have hope in all this mess? Yuck!

Let me tell you, anger is a trait that comes really easy to me and I’m feeling a little anger. I don’t get as riled up as I used to, but there was a time when I was a real spitfire. I’m sure part of it was being the smallest kid in the classroom. Every recess I felt I had to prove I was just as valuable to whatever sport team was in season; baseball, football, basketball, I gave it my all, all the time. And if it took some pushing and shoving to prove I was a force to be reckoned with, so be it. In college, I think I was probably the only person to be threatened with a ban from intramural sports for being too competitive. How crazy do you have to be to be too competitive for sports? That’s the whole basis of sports, competition. Am I right, or am I right?

That same push through at all costs also manifested itself in other areas of life. I can remember people saying, you really love to argue, you should be a lawyer. Now I’m not sure what that says about people’s impressions of lawyers, but it says something about how people viewed me. I was willing to go toe to toe with anyone, and prove my way of seeing the world was right.

But that begs this question: Are we allowed as people of faith, to have the luxury of getting angry? We like to think of Jesus as meek and always calm. After all, in Mathew’s telling of the Good News Jesus says, **Matthew 5:22** *“But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.”*

Did you hear? If you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment. That sounds like clear instruction not to get mad. We can add in these words from James, *“You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.”*

I was the opposite of James. Instead of quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; I was unwilling to listen, quick to speak, and prone to anger. Come on, bring it on, I’ll go toe to toe with you. Good thing age has a way of mellowing us out. So does experience. I was so prone to anger that I even got mad at a baseball backstop. Yes, I learned to channel my anger because of co-ed softball.

When I was in college, I played co-ed softball. One day, one of the young women was placed in my normal position, second base. We lost the game, and I was mad, as usual, about losing. So I started pounding my glove and muttering to myself. I started to walk back to the dorm in my anger. I came to the bench by the field and I stepped over it. I wasn’t turning aside for anything. But then I hit another obstacle. I looked up to see the height of the back stop. I started climbing. I climbed to the top of the backstop, lifted myself over, and started coming down. Then it happened… my foot was stuck. The loop of my shoelace had caught on the top of the fence, and I was hanging by my shoelace. I had to call out and have someone climb up and unhook me. Talk about embarrassing.

I learned misguided anger can get a guy in trouble. I really want to be able to let things not get to me. I want to let the world wash over me. I want to be like some other people and just let God handle everything, but I can’t, I need to know there’s hope. I need to know that God is in charge, and laying back and being passive doesn’t do it for me. I have a need to mix it up, to stir the waters. There are times when the news just becomes too much and I need to copy Jesus, not the meek Jesus that that says *“if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment.”* No, I want to model the other Jesus. The Jesus that goes around flipping tables. The Jesus that says enough is enough! Let’s draw that line in the sand and take action! Let’s take on the powers that be head to head. Anyone with me?

Oh, wait. I think we have a problem. The Romans pretty much showed what happens when you take power on head to head. Look what they did to Jesus. And as much as I hate to admit it, I know anger and violence doesn’t solve much either. Fighting fire with fire only results in a scorched earth. I think Martin Luther King said it best in his book, Strength to Love, *“Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.”*

We are in the middle of our series on what gives us hope, and what gives me hope is showing love. My hope is anchored in bringing light to the world. Taking action and being hands on working on issues that make me mad, that’s what helps me know that God is doing something, and God’s doing it through me. And when you’re in service, God’s doing something through you too.

What are some of the things that make you angry right now? Are you upset that our government is taking children away from their parents and sending them hundreds of miles away just because they dare to try to find a safer place to live? Then our Immigration Hospitality Team is looking for you. Does it make you angry that we have people who don’t have enough to eat right here in Ann Arbor? L.O.V.E. Thy Neighbor is the group you want to hook up with. They make sandwiches and hand out food directly to people in need. Are you nervous that the gains that LGBTQ people have made are going to be reversed? Our Rainbow Crossing group is always looking for new members. Does it pain you knowing that families are living out of their cars? Then Alpha House could use your help.

Actually, being in service for others is more than something you need to do when you’re angry, it’s something that we, as God’s children, are called to do for each other *all* the time. This idea of helping those in need is ingrained in our holy texts:

**Deuteronomy 15:11** *“Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.’”*

**Exodus 22:21** *“Don’t mistreat or oppress an immigrant, because you were once immigrants in the land of Egypt. “*

**Hebrews 13:16** *“Don’t forget to do good and to share what you have because God is pleased with these kinds of sacrifices.”*

The list of verses about helping others goes on and on, but this is the one that drives the point home for me. **James 2:14** *“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?”*

What good is it if you talk a good game, but never walk the walk?

What good is it if you say you love God, but never show that love to God’s people?

How does the world ever change if we never make any attempt to change it?

John Wesley had a saying that relates to our situation. He was ordaining a group of clergy and he asked “Have they fruit?” Have they fruit? Basically, he wanted to know, do their outward lives show their love of God. Being in service is one sign of having fruit. Helping others is part of who we are, and what we do as Methodists. So I ask, have you fruit?

Richard Foster in his classic book, Celebration of Discipline writes about 12 different practices that Christians should cultivate. Service is one of these traits, and this is what he says about service. *“Service is not a list of things that we do, though in it we discover things to do. It is not a code of ethics, but a way of living. To do specific acts of service is not the same thing as living in the Discipline of service. Just as there is more to the game of basketball than the rule book, there is more to service than specific acts of serving. It is one thing to act like a servant, it is quite another to be a servant.”*

It is one thing to act like a servant, it is quite another to be a servant. My concerns might define where I serve, but God’s love defines how I serve. Recently I started volunteering at the Delonis Center. For those that don’t know what it is, it’s the homeless shelter located in downtown Ann Arbor. Few things touch my heart like seeing homeless people in the cold and rain does. How is it that in this great country of abundance, we can’t take care of those that are the most vulnerable in society? Those with mental conditions, or physical issues, or just the bad luck to have a trade that isn’t in demand anymore. Whatever the reason, how can we abandon people to the elements? So I’ve started getting up early in the morning and going to the center a couple of mornings each week before I start my day at the church. In a short time I’ve made friends with residents. Folks like Jay and Barry, and Cindy and Dawn. And I’m a better person for it.

I guess that’s the final point I want to make. When I serve, it’s not the people I’m with who get the biggest benefit, it’s me. I’m the one who gets feed spiritually, it’s me who feels fulfilled, it’s me who gets to sense God at work. Think about it, how often do we get to feel God’s presence outside of church? We get to feel it when we’re serving others. You will feel God when you serve others.

Now I don’t want you to worry about solving the issue yourself. When you’re in service, you’re part of God’s bigger plan. The great 20th century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote, “Nothing is worth doing that can be done in our lifetime.” Will we solve racism? No, but we can help move the discussion along. Will we solve homelessness? No but we can make a dent in the situation here in Ann Arbor.

I used to be pretty rough and tumble, I was always looking to mix it up when I felt the world was being unjust. I still do, but instead of using my fists and anger, I use my faith and love. Let me tell you, I think I’m getting a lot more done with love, than I did with anger.

So is the world driving you crazy? Feel like you can’t take it anymore? Then go ahead follow Jesus and flip some tables, but flip them kindly, flip them through service to others, and flip them out of love. Sometimes a good table flip is the answer to transforming the world.

If you have any questions, come see me. We can grab a cup of coffee and talk in more depth.