**Sermon for JULY 23, 2023** **Psalm 37:7-9 and Ecclesiastes 7:8-9 “Retiring Your IRA”**

A reading concerning wrath, from Psalm 37: *Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.  For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land.*

And by contrast, the wisdom found in Ecclesiastes: *The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.  Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.*

Our foray into the realm of deadly sins and heavenly virtues continues today as we explore wrath, and its corrective counterpart, patience. We surely would have been hesitant to personalize pridefulness a few weeks ago, and equally shy about owning up to greed last week, but anger is surely something that we have all wrestled with our whole lives. We have all been angry and sometimes that anger has created repercussions that changed our lives substantially. It is my hope and prayer that today’s discussion will reveal the island of patience that can be our camping place until the rage subsides, when that happens, as it surely will.

To quote from the encyclopedia: *Modern psychologists view anger as a primary, natural, and mature emotion experienced by virtually all humans at times, and as something that has functional value for survival. Anger is seen as a supportive mechanism to show a person that something is wrong and requires changing. Anger can mobilize psychological resources for corrective action. Uncontrolled anger can, however, negatively affect personal or social well-being and impact negatively on those around them. It is equally challenging to be around an enraged person and the impact can also cause psychological or emotional trauma if not dealt with.* So, before we continue, we clarify: anger is natural, unavoidable, even desirable in some ways. We have just heard from Jon Hallsted, and it was not some goody-two-shoes mentality that moved his heart to risk life and limb to bring medical care and spiritual healing to underserved people all over the world; what moved him was anger! Anger at injustice, anger at wastefulness, anger that so many folks would be too distracted by basic survival needs that they might never know the healing, upbuilding love of God. Anger can be motivational and good, but *uncontrolled anger*, what we might call rage or wrath or ire, that is the deadly sin, for it leads us over the cliff into steep and rough terrain.

And that’s the thing about the deadly sins that I want to solidify in our minds – what makes them deadly is that they are perversions of natural and healthy human qualities. Take pride, for example: there is a level of self-esteem and self-regard that makes us whole, but when we push that into the prideful place, our excessive and distorted self-love becomes toxic. Likewise, there is nothing wrong with wanting clothes on your back and a roof over your head and some money in the bank, but when acquiring those things becomes our god, greediness will lead us to ruin. Wrath, then, is the perversion of anger, which is an early warning system of great value. Anger uncontrolled, compulsive and indulgent, grows into wrath, with its life-altering consequences. We have candles on our altar, right? You might use candles at a dinner table, or light a cozy fire in the fireplace on a winter’s eve, or enjoy singing around a campfire and roasting marshmallows. But the fire-born destruction and calamity so many of us have experienced firsthand here in Northern California is a horror almost unfathomable, and illustrates for us the difference between anger and rage. All the types of fire I have mentioned are beneficial if controlled, but life-threatening when out of control. Just like pride, just like greed, and just like wrath.

I think you get the point, so enough of my words, and a few words from well-respected authors and thinkers. Here is a quote from Mitch Albom: *“Learn this from me. Holding anger is a poison. It eats you from inside. We think that hating is a weapon that attacks the person who harmed us. But hatred is a curved blade. And the harm we do, we do to ourselves.”* [Salman Rushdie](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/3299.Salman_Rushdie) has this to add: *“In the end, rage, no matter how profoundly justified, destroys the enraged. Just as we are created anew by what we love, so we are reduced and unmade by what we hate.”*

Okay? Anger is fine, but ire, the Latin IRA, not so much, and needs to be retired. How we do that, of course, ties directly to the heavenly virtue paired with wrath, the virtue allegedly seldom found in women and never in men, the virtue of patience. And here we are again on familiar soil, for Jesus, Paul and the prophets all encourage us to patience. A warrior society that favors swashbuckling more than self-control might paint patience in limpid pastel tones, but patience is actually one of our greatest strengths. The Venerable [Fulton J. Sheen](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/2412.Fulton_J_Sheen) said this: *“Patience is power. Patience is not an absence of action; rather it is "timing"; it waits on the right time to act, for the right principles and in the right way.”* We reinforce patience together when we travel annually through the great waiting seasons of Advent and Lent. Acquiring patience and using it to create distance between our violent impulses and their disastrous aftermaths has been core to the Church’s teachings forever. It does no good to aspire to an absence of anger, for anger is biological, and God made that biology! But we should aspire to an absence of *rage,* and we create the powerful means of diffusing escalating anger through the steady and thoughtful practice of patience.

The priest and philosopher [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/5387.Pierre_Teilhard_de_Chardin) guides us home today, reminding us that we emulate God when we practice the ways of patience: *“Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability— and that it may take a very long time. And so I think it is with you; your ideas mature gradually—let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste. Don’t try to force them on, as though you could be today what time will make of you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. So give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.”* As usual, friends we are at choice, always. Rage is decisive but destructive; patience seems inconclusive but leaves room for growth and healing. Our lives and the lives of our world will be richly enhanced as we continue to embrace the heavenly virtue of patience. Amen.