

The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.¹⁴ Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts...

In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"— Mark 11

I'm getting angry. As the fear and the anxiety around COVID-19 become more commonplace and I can move on to other emotions, I'm finding a large one to be anger. And that's ok. You see, when I started really dealing with my anxiety a decade ago, I learned that for me one of the major causes was anger that I never let myself acknowledge let alone feel. And I've found as I share my story that this is far more common in Christian families than I ever guessed. We are often raised to believe that Christians aren't supposed to get angry (except "righteous anger" which is never defined) so when we feel the normal anger that's part of life, we push it down, ignore it, or talk ourselves out of it. And after decades of this, that anger begins to pop back up in our lives, usually as anxiety. This is my journey.

So anytime I can truly feel angry, I remember that's ok. And I have been. I'm angry at those ignoring the Best Practices orders of our leadership. I'm angry at this virus. I'm angry at death and at fear. I'm angry at those capitalizing on our national anxiety to make a quick buck. And while I'm not angry at God right now, that may be coming. And that's ok, too.

Yes, it's ok to be angry. Jesus was. This Holy Week passage from Mark 11 gives us an example of Jesus' anger. It's a Markan Sandwich (yum!), which just means that Mark put a story in the middle of another, like the peanut butter in the middle of two pieces of bread. He does this so each story will help us understand the other.

Mark is the only author to put these two stories together this way, so we have to ask why. What does Jesus cursing a fig tree have to do with Him tossing tables, coins, doves, and even money-changers in the temple courts? Well, both are a single warning. This fig tree, an ancient symbol of God's people, wasn't bearing fruit, and that made Jesus mad, so He cursed it. And the curse had power – the fig tree withered. In the same way, Jesus looked at God's people and saw that they were not bearing spiritual fruit, and so He warned His disciples that this was the beginning of the withering of God's people.

So what of the cleansing of the temple? Lots of ink has been spilled on this one, so let me just say that the lack of respect for God – as seen by a lack of respect for His temple – was another sign that the people were withering. And this lack of respect, this lack of fruit, makes Jesus angry. And it should make us angry, too.

As Jesus approached His cross, He looked at the lack of fruit in His people's lives and it angered Him. Perhaps this is the lesson for us. While we get mad at all the things that inconvenience, or threaten, or scare us, what we should really be getting angry at is the lack of fruit born by today's Church, under Shelter In Place rules or not. And what should worry us much more than COVID-19 is whether we are bearing fruit ourselves. This is Jesus' warning, then and now.

What scares you right now?

What makes you angry right now?

What fruit are you bearing? (See Galatians 5:22 to see an example of that fruit.)