

Name

**Anger**

***by Brenda Layman***

Shakespeare’s play, The Tragedy of Richard the Third, opens with the words,

“Now is the winter of our discontent

Made glorious summer by this son of York;

And all the clouds that low’r’d upon our house

In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.

The character of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, goes on to speak bitterly of his situation. The war is over, the battles won, and the court is enjoying a time of peace. However, while others enjoy themselves, indulging in music, games, and romance, Richard feels himself an outcast. He is physically deformed, unable to join in the days of dancing and nights of love. Thus, Richard resolves:

“And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover

To entertain these fair, well-spoken days

I am determined to prove a villain.”

One of the reasons that the works of an Elizabethan playwright have continued to appeal throughout the generations is that they portray so accurately human emotions and motivations. Although I am a twenty-first century woman, I can readily identify with this character from a bygone century. The Duke of Gloucester is hurting. All around him he sees happy people in love, and he knows that these joys will never be his. His deformity has limited his accomplishments to the battlefield, where he finds himself accepted and admired. In a peaceful society, he is an outsider, lonely, unwanted, and avoided.

Those of us who struggle with loss and bereavement know these feelings. We watch others with their loved ones, crying inside as we feel so keenly the absence of ours. We hear about the happy times that other people enjoy, feeling that such happiness is now denied to us. We who have had our dreams snatched away agonize over the enormity of our loss, and such agony beats within us, demanding expression. Often it finds expression not as sorrow, but like Richard’s, as anger.

Anger feels more comfortable than sorrow. While we are angry, we can focus our thoughts on an enemy, rather than on our loss. We can delay the acceptance of our loss, extending our denial by means of a protracted battle, believing that, somehow, we can “win” and make things right again. We can see ourselves as strong people, warriors against injustice, rather than as vulnerable people who have been wounded and may be wounded again. On many levels, anger gives us what we think we need.

However, like Richard, we only delude ourselves if we think that we can fight our way out of sorrow. The only cure for grief is grieving. The only relief from sorrow is in acknowledging sorrow. In the words of the children’s rhyme, “Can’t go over it. Can’t go under it. Can’t go around it. Have to go through it.” We can keep swinging at those adversaries for a very long time, but until we realize that the real battle is within, we will not heal.

In a conversation with a man who counsels the recently bereaved, I heard this: “Often, when I arrive at a widow’s home, she will be crying when she opens the door. These women always apologize for crying, and I ask them ‘How long were you married?’ They might answer, ‘Sixty years.’ ‘Don’t you think you should be crying?’ I ask.”

For a while, after Carol died, I tried to choke back the tears that threatened whenever I thought of her. It didn’t work very well. Then, one day, I told myself that I had every right to cry. Why shouldn’t I cry? Strangely enough, after acknowledging this, I cried less.

In my readings on physical and emotional wellness, I have found, again and again, the assertion that unresolved anger results in illness. Our minds and bodies simply are not designed to maintain a state of anger over a long period of time. By choosing to nurture anger rather than acknowledge sorrow, we create a state of unhealthy stress for ourselves, often resulting in deterioration of our physical and mental well-being. We compound our personal trauma by adding disease to distress. We may even focus anger on our own bodies, which seem to have betrayed us just when we are least able to deal with infirmity. In reality, our bodies are telling us to stop the fight, release the anger, and allow ourselves to heal.

Are you still fighting a battle that is over? Is it time to end the one-sided war and nurture peace within your psyche? Can you let yourself stop fighting and learn to nurture yourself, enjoying the “fair well-spoken days” that are still to be? Shakespeare’s story of Richard the Third is a tragedy, but our lives do not have to remain tragic. We can choose to put down our weapons and seek peace and joy. It may not seem easy at first, but it is possible.

Peace to your spirit,

Brenda

Brenda Layman is a writer, teacher, and Lay Speaker in the United Methodist Church. She has published articles in Leader in the Church School Today, Discipleship Journal and the Columbus Dispatch.