

## Getting Angry –

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Pastors are commonly thought of as caring, comforting, and encouraging entities who have relegated their emotions wholly towards empathy, support, and “being nice.” They are perhaps not thought of as capable of anger or outrage. Well, I proved myself capable of such emotions recently when I got really, really angry. I was picking up a take-out order at a local fast food restaurant where you stand properly-distanced in line and tell the persons behind the counter what you would like on your taco, burrito, or enchilada. As I entered the restaurant, I noticed that there were probably around 20 to 30 people in the facility, some eating, some in line, some working – almost everyone was wearing a mask and properly distanced from each other. Almost.

As I took my place in line, I noticed a couple in front of me who were not wearing masks – and talking somewhat loudly about it. Shall we say, they were not being polite? The time came for them to place their orders, and the person working behind the counter said to them, “I’m sorry, we need to have you put on a mask; I would be glad to give you one if you’d like.” The man then made a scoffing sound, and pulled his t-shirt up over his face. “I’m sorry, sir, but that won’t do; I have a mask you can use, or you can leave.” The man and woman then both made what might be called grumblings and made several rolling of the eyes movements, after which the man said with a scoff, “Alright, give me a mask – I don’t want you to get into trouble.” They proceeded to wear their masks while continuing to grumble, placed their order – and promptly threw their masks on the floor in front of the cash register after they had purchased their meal.

Disrespectful. Arrogant. Rude. Discourteous. Hostile. Impolite, Bad-mannered, Uncouth, Insolent, Offensive, and a whole host of other words (yes, my Thesaurus helped me!) describe their demeanor. These people, in short, made me mad. So mad, that **I knew I had to act**. So I walked up to them and said “you are very rude people” and took them both firmly by the hand (after putting on my latex gloves, of course) and led them behind the counter to apologize to those workers for giving them a hard time for simply doing their job; I made them pick up the masks they had thrown on the floor; and I made them write on a chalkboard “I will be nice to people” a thousand times until the message got through.

No, I did not do any of those things. But I did something. As soon as I found myself ready to place my order, I couldn’t help myself – I complimented the workers who dealt with this couple. “Thank you for handling that well,” I said, “It must be hard to deal with people when they give you a difficult time. I am very grateful for people like you who are trying to look out for others; thanks for watching out for us all.”

You would have thought I was some sort of celebrity for, had those four workers behind the counter not been gloved and handling food, I think they would have given me a round of applause! Instead, they gave me verbal applause, thanking me for my words, saying how nice it is to have someone understand what they are doing and why; one worker said it best – “We all should be taking care of each other rather than treating each other with contempt.” I heard a few comments from behind me and realized there were around ten or fifteen people behind me in line; they were all masked, nodding their heads in agreement, and saying “good job” to the workers. It all took no more than about 20 seconds, but I felt like those two disrespectful persons were met with twenty or thirty persons who appreciated that we need to look out for each other.

It seems as if some people simply cannot understand what that worker said, namely that WE NEED TO TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER. We need to look out for each other. We need to help each other. This is not just a central element of my faith understanding – it is a central element of what it means to be human. It is a central element of what it means to be a healthy, functioning society. It is a central element of what it means to live a meaningful life. Community is essential.

Our own personal welfare is inextricably linked to the welfare of others. There are those who have forgotten this truth, or translated it through the distorted lens of human self-sufficiency – for no one of us is able to live full lives alone. Jesus came to the world for this purpose -- to reveal our need for God and for each other. Complete independence from each other is not only impossible – it is toxic both to society and individual human life. In the past, it's been food, clothing, and shelter; today it is living wage jobs, eradicating racism, and wearing masks. **These are not things of an individual nature alone in our world today;** they need community, they need foundations, they need relationships that consider the needs of the whole to address the needs of the one. We need what others can share, just as they need what we can share.

Grace to you,  
Rev. John Daniels