

Good morning.

Over the weekend the streets of London were packed with up to 150,000 protestors noisily expressing their anger about immigration and the small boats crisis, their frustration occasionally tipping over into violence. Here in Lancashire, anger over the Gaza conflict risks undermining years of careful social cohesion work. It is no wonder that in churches yesterday, I met many who are alarmed that rage is becoming the defining feature of our social discourse.

As any child brought up in a domestically abusive home will tell you, anger is a terrifying emotion to witness. It is also terrifying to feel because its overwhelming intensity can strip away a person's self-control. However it is not an emotion that is healthy to suppress. The important question is what to do with it.

Christian theology has developed a nuanced approach to anger. St Augustine drew a distinction between anger rooted in charity and anger rooted in pride, and that has led other Christian thinkers to describe two types of anger. Just anger is a measured response to a clear wrong. It is motivated by love or by the desire for truth and can be channelled into words and actions that build a better world. Destructive anger on the other hand is rooted in hatred or impatience. It is uncontrolled and it feeds on itself. It harms not just the angry person but also those around them.

It's a nice distinction, but the problem is, how do you know which type of anger you are feeling? For example I expect that many of those on Saturday's march would say that their anger is just and that they are seeking to deepen national unity by honestly naming a problem that they feel is being downplayed.

One way to answer the question is to think about the fruit of one's anger, and Moses, who demonstrates both types of anger, is a classic illustration. Early in his life Moses showed destructive anger by murdering an Egyptian. The fruit of that anger was bitter: Moses had to flee Egypt, his people suffered, his community was damaged. Many years later though, he showed just anger when he smashed the tablets that bore the words of the ten commandments. That ferocious sign bore fruit in rebuilding a community divided by idolatry and restoring his people's faith.

In an era defined increasingly by rage, maybe people need to examine themselves about the fruit of their own anger. Too much destructive anger undermines the values that hold a society together. But the raw energy of an anger that is just means that it can be channelled in constructive ways to build unity and change lives for good.