

Let me preface this story by saying that I truly and genuinely love my father-in-law. He's a kind and generous man, and I am grateful to know him. We have different ideas about some things, but we enjoy debating politics together. Even in our disagreement, I love and respect him. Let me also preface this story by saying that our house does not have an air conditioner.

It was during the freak, record-breaking heatwave in June, late at night. I don't stay up late much anymore, but Stephanie and I were both up late because it was so hot and we couldn't sleep, and also to keep the house opened up to the cool night air for as long as possible before locking up for the night. I was laying in the hammock in our backyard, stripped down to my shorts, still uncomfortably warm in the 80+ degree heat, at midnight, in June, and thinking as I stared into the inky sky that this is going to become more and more normal. I was hot, and I was tired, and I was unable to sleep, and I got angry. I got angry at my father-in-law.

He doesn't believe that climate change is a human problem, you see. We've had this discussion many times. I've showed him graphs, and pointed him to peer-reviewed studies, and talked with him about the geologic history of the planet and the carbon cycle, and he remains convinced that "the science is still out" on whether this is a human-made problem, whether there is anything we can or should do about it.

I suppose I picked him to get angry at because he's the one face I can put on a large segment of humanity that believes the same thing. I have had the conversation with him a number of times, and there seems to be nothing I can do to convince him, to get through to him that this is a problem, that this is our problem. Laying there in the sweat and the heat and the vain hope of a cool breeze, I suppose I felt hopeless because if I can't convince one person—one person whom I actually love, and who loves me—then what are the chances that anything will ever happen? And so, in my hopelessness on that sweltering night, I got angry.

So when I read these words from James today—"Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; your anger does not produce God's righteousness." —I can't help but think of that hot, angry night and hear James speaking right to me, right to us.

Outrage is ubiquitous. With all that is going on—the pandemic, the long-overdue reckoning around racial justice, the recent discoveries of mass graves at Native American boarding schools, the climate change crisis, the refugee crisis, the homelessness epidemic—there is plenty to be outraged about. There is so much happening in our world that should be easily solved if we could only agree on how to do it.

I think there are a lot of us who can relate to my story. We've all got examples of friends or relatives or acquaintances with whom we've had similar conversations to the ones I've had with my father-in-law; or, more often than not, with whom we've avoided similar conversations. When we know that we disagree, when we know that we're not going to change one another's minds or accomplish anything other than starting a fight, it's hard to justify bringing anything up. Outrage is so pervasive we get burnt out on it; but if we don't talk about these things, nothing changes.

Speaking as a straight, White, cis-gendered man, I have to say it feels like a very privileged thing for me to be able to say that "my anger doesn't bring God's righteousness," especially when nothing else has brought God's righteousness, either: not logic or reason, not science or research, not empathy, not the legal system or the education system or the political system. When injustice persists, when real people are suffering from the ignorance or the inaction of those in power, how can one not get angry?

But I notice that James doesn't say, "don't get angry." He says, "be slow to anger." Sometimes anger is justified, and sometimes it is helpful and even necessary. But the next thing he says is also true: our anger does not bring about God's righteousness.

Anger, just like the fears and mistrusts and greeds and hatreds that cause these problems in the first place, is something that comes from within us. Jesus reminds his disciples today that it is those things that come from within us, things like theft and murder and envy and pride, that defile us.

To "defile" literally means to "make common." The Pharisees questioned Jesus about why his disciples ate with "common hands," which is to say, hands not purified by washing. As God's chosen people, they were expected to purify themselves as God is pure. It was a physical reminder of who they were, and of whose they were. What Jesus explains to the Pharisees is that we can't make ourselves pure or impure, clean or unclean, sanctified or defiled. Our anger, like anything else that comes from within, regardless of its intent, is not able to make us or anything else godly.

In my anger, I wish that I could somehow make my father-in-law (whose name, by the way, is also James) and everyone else who believes what he does to come around to my way of thinking. I wanted to assert power over them to make them like me. The intent may be good, but, as the old proverb reminds us, the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. It is the good intentions of generations of colonizers and oppressors to "subdue the earth" and "tame the savages" and bring peace and order that got us to where we are; it is the unbridled belief that I am

right and the opposition is wrong that has created the problems with which we now struggle. How can the anger that created the problems also solve them?

What I notice in the gospel story is that the “human traditions” Jesus talks about are most often used to differentiate. They separate clean from unclean, right from wrong, virtuous people from wicked ones. It is from outside of these “human traditions” that Jesus comes; and it’s Mark who notices that what he says declares all foods clean. Mark notices that, according to Jesus, all foods are the same, all given for nourishment, all capable of giving growth and life. It makes sense; after all, all foods are created by God. Could it be that maybe this also applies to all the people created by God, even the ones who seem to work so hard against God’s own purposes?

I wonder if this isn’t why James counsels us to be quick to listen and slow to speak. It’s easy to demonize the other, to imagine that only malice or stupidity or genetic malfunction could possibly make a person so wicked, but this is an assumption made in ignorance. I’m not suggesting that maybe White Nationalism or exploitative consumption have merits to which we ought to be open, but have we ever stopped to think about why such destructive belief systems persist in the 21st century? Why so many people adhere to these things so tightly? I wonder if people cling to these idols for the same reasons we cling to our own: because these are the tiny gods whom we have trusted to save us from whatever it is that frightens us. In fact, I wonder if that’s really where my own anger comes from: from feeling threatened when another person disparages the gods in whom I trust.

Even justice itself can become an idol when it causes us to hate and mistrust and fear other people rather than loving them. Love can spark anger, but anger borne out of love is fundamentally different than anger borne out of frustration or a desire to control. That kind of anger is the result of hearing the word, but failing to do it. We can look into the mirror and see the justice, but then we immediately look away and forget that at the core of justice is love. In the heat of that June midnight, I wanted to change the world—for the better, according to me; but it was the heat and my own frustration and hopelessness that bred that anger, not my love for my father-in-law or my home or anything else. I was afraid of death, of extinction, and so I became angry. What becomes plain to me in the light of day is that such anger cannot really bring about God’s righteousness. The best it can do is help me enforce my pale facsimile in its place.

Oddly enough, this is what gives me hope in this story. My anger cannot bring God’s righteousness. In fact, nothing of mine can bring God’s righteousness. Even my best intentions are

so often defiled with selfish desires. Because I cannot bring God's righteousness, I don't have to; I can leave that job to God. And that is precisely what God is doing: in the embodied love of Christ, God is saving not only our world, but our souls. The best thing we can do is join in that love.

But love is not something we can just "do," something that can be taught. One cannot learn how to love more fully; one can only experience it, be opened by it. Not unlike how the stagnant heat of that sweltering June night stoked the embers of my anger, the rain of God's perfect love, when it falls on our parched hearts, sprouts new life and healing.

Listening to one another—not to rebut, but to understand—is one way to love. It has the capacity to bind us together rather than to separate us. It becomes harder to demonize someone whose humanity we have experienced firsthand. It can help us see that, though we have differentiated ourselves and our beliefs and values according to human traditions, the One who made us has made us all One. In Christ, we are all the same. If human action is to divide and separate and differentiate, God's action is to bring together, to reconcile, to unify.

Whether or not we can get our act together in time to prevent our own extinction, I know that our only hope for doing so lies not in demonizing and reviling one another, for that is the way of death, the way of the Empire who crucifies anyone who stands in its way. Ironically, the way to life is the way of the cross, the way of the Crucified. He is the word of truth, implanted in us, with the power to save us.

Let me preface this story by saying that I truly and genuinely love my father-in-law. He's a kind and generous man, and I am grateful to know him. We have different ideas about some things, but we enjoy debating politics together. Even in our disagreement, I love and respect him. Let me also preface this story by saying that our house does not have an air conditioner.

It was during the freak, record-breaking heatwave in June, late at night. I don't stay up late much anymore, but Stephanie and I were both up late because it was so hot and we couldn't sleep, and also to keep the house opened up to the cool night air for as long as possible before locking up for the night. I was laying in the hammock in our backyard, stripped down to my shorts, still uncomfortably warm in the 80+ degree heat, at midnight, in June, and thinking as I stared into the inky sky that this is going to become more and more normal. I was hot, and I was tired, and I was unable to sleep, and I got angry. I got angry at my father-in-law.

He doesn't believe that climate change is a human problem, you see. We've had this discussion many times. I've showed him graphs, and pointed him to peer-reviewed studies, and talked with him about the geologic history of the planet and the carbon cycle, and he remains convinced that "the science is still out" on whether this is a human-made problem, whether there is anything we can or should do about it.

I suppose I picked him to get angry at because he's the one face I can put on a large segment of humanity that believes the same thing. I have had the conversation with him a number of times, and there seems to be nothing I can do to convince him, to get through to him that this is a problem, that this is our problem. Laying there in the sweat and the heat and the vain hope of a cool breeze, I suppose I felt hopeless because if I can't convince one person—one person whom I actually love, and who loves me—then what are the chances that anything will ever happen? And so, in my hopelessness on that sweltering night, I got angry.

So when I read these words from James today—"Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; your anger does not produce God's righteousness." —I can't help but think of that hot, angry night and hear James speaking right to me, right to us.

Outrage is ubiquitous. With all that is going on—the pandemic, the long-overdue reckoning around racial justice, the recent discoveries of mass graves at Native American boarding schools, the climate change crisis, the refugee crisis, the homelessness epidemic—there is plenty to be outraged about. There is so much happening in our world that should be easily solved if we could only agree on how to do it.

I think there are a lot of us who can relate to my story. We've all got examples of friends or relatives or acquaintances with whom we've had similar conversations to the ones I've had with my father-in-law; or, more often than not, with whom we've avoided similar conversations. When we know that we disagree, when we know that we're not going to change one another's minds or accomplish anything other than starting a fight, it's hard to justify bringing anything up. Outrage is so pervasive we get burnt out on it; but if we don't talk about these things, nothing changes.

Speaking as a straight, White, cis-gendered man, I have to say it feels like a very privileged thing for me to be able to say that "my anger doesn't bring God's righteousness," especially when nothing else has brought God's righteousness, either: not logic or reason, not science or research, not empathy, not the legal system or the education system or the political system. When injustice persists, when real people are suffering from the ignorance or the inaction of those in power, how can one not get angry?

But I notice that James doesn't say, "don't get angry." He says, "be slow to anger." Sometimes anger is justified, and sometimes it is helpful and even necessary. But the next thing he says is also true: our anger does not bring about God's righteousness.

Anger, just like the fears and mistrusts and greeds and hatreds that cause these problems in the first place, is something that comes from within us. Jesus reminds his disciples today that it is those things that come from within us, things like theft and murder and envy and pride, that defile us.

To "defile" literally means to "make common." The Pharisees questioned Jesus about why his disciples ate with "common hands," which is to say, hands not purified by washing. As God's chosen people, they were expected to purify themselves as God is pure. It was a physical reminder of who they were, and of whose they were. What Jesus explains to the Pharisees is that we can't make ourselves pure or impure, clean or unclean, sanctified or defiled. Our anger, like anything else that comes from within, regardless of its intent, is not able to make us or anything else godly.

In my anger, I wish that I could somehow make my father-in-law (whose name, by the way, is also James) and everyone else who believes what he does to come around to my way of thinking. I wanted to assert power over them to make them like me. The intent may be good, but, as the old proverb reminds us, the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. It is the good intentions of generations of colonizers and oppressors to "subdue the earth" and "tame the savages" and bring peace and order that got us to where we are; it is the unbridled belief that I am

right and the opposition is wrong that has created the problems with which we now struggle. How can the anger that created the problems also solve them?

What I notice in the gospel story is that the “human traditions” Jesus talks about are most often used to differentiate. They separate clean from unclean, right from wrong, virtuous people from wicked ones. It is from outside of these “human traditions” that Jesus comes; and it’s Mark who notices that what he says declares all foods clean. Mark notices that, according to Jesus, all foods are the same, all given for nourishment, all capable of giving growth and life. It makes sense; after all, all foods are created by God. Could it be that maybe this also applies to all the people created by God, even the ones who seem to work so hard against God’s own purposes?

I wonder if this isn’t why James counsels us to be quick to listen and slow to speak. It’s easy to demonize the other, to imagine that only malice or stupidity or genetic malfunction could possibly make a person so wicked, but this is an assumption made in ignorance. I’m not suggesting that maybe White Nationalism or exploitative consumption have merits to which we ought to be open, but have we ever stopped to think about why such destructive belief systems persist in the 21st century? Why so many people adhere to these things so tightly? I wonder if people cling to these idols for the same reasons we cling to our own: because these are the tiny gods whom we have trusted to save us from whatever it is that frightens us. In fact, I wonder if that’s really where my own anger comes from: from feeling threatened when another person disparages the gods in whom I trust.

Even justice itself can become an idol when it causes us to hate and mistrust and fear other people rather than loving them. Love can spark anger, but anger borne out of love is fundamentally different than anger borne out of frustration or a desire to control. That kind of anger is the result of hearing the word, but failing to do it. We can look into the mirror and see the justice, but then we immediately look away and forget that at the core of justice is love. In the heat of that June midnight, I wanted to change the world—for the better, according to me; but it was the heat and my own frustration and hopelessness that bred that anger, not my love for my father-in-law or my home or anything else. I was afraid of death, of extinction, and so I became angry. What becomes plain to me in the light of day is that such anger cannot really bring about God’s righteousness. The best it can do is help me enforce my pale facsimile in its place.

Oddly enough, this is what gives me hope in this story. My anger cannot bring God’s righteousness. In fact, nothing of mine can bring God’s righteousness. Even my best intentions are

so often defiled with selfish desires. Because I cannot bring God's righteousness, I don't have to; I can leave that job to God. And that is precisely what God is doing: in the embodied love of Christ, God is saving not only our world, but our souls. The best thing we can do is join in that love.

But love is not something we can just "do," something that can be taught. One cannot learn how to love more fully; one can only experience it, be opened by it. Not unlike how the stagnant heat of that sweltering June night stoked the embers of my anger, the rain of God's perfect love, when it falls on our parched hearts, sprouts new life and healing.

Listening to one another—not to rebut, but to understand—is one way to love. It has the capacity to bind us together rather than to separate us. It becomes harder to demonize someone whose humanity we have experienced firsthand. It can help us see that, though we have differentiated ourselves and our beliefs and values according to human traditions, the One who made us has made us all One. In Christ, we are all the same. If human action is to divide and separate and differentiate, God's action is to bring together, to reconcile, to unify.

Whether or not we can get our act together in time to prevent our own extinction, I know that our only hope for doing so lies not in demonizing and reviling one another, for that is the way of death, the way of the Empire who crucifies anyone who stands in its way. Ironically, the way to life is the way of the cross, the way of the Crucified. He is the word of truth, implanted in us, with the power to save us.

Let me preface this story by saying that I truly and genuinely love my father-in-law. He's a kind and generous man, and I am grateful to know him. We have different ideas about some things, but we enjoy debating politics together. Even in our disagreement, I love and respect him. Let me also preface this story by saying that our house does not have an air conditioner.

It was during the freak, record-breaking heatwave in June, late at night. I don't stay up late much anymore, but Stephanie and I were both up late because it was so hot and we couldn't sleep, and also to keep the house opened up to the cool night air for as long as possible before locking up for the night. I was laying in the hammock in our backyard, stripped down to my shorts, still uncomfortably warm in the 80+ degree heat, at midnight, in June, and thinking as I stared into the inky sky that this is going to become more and more normal. I was hot, and I was tired, and I was unable to sleep, and I got angry. I got angry at my father-in-law.

He doesn't believe that climate change is a human problem, you see. We've had this discussion many times. I've showed him graphs, and pointed him to peer-reviewed studies, and talked with him about the geologic history of the planet and the carbon cycle, and he remains convinced that "the science is still out" on whether this is a human-made problem, whether there is anything we can or should do about it.

I suppose I picked him to get angry at because he's the one face I can put on a large segment of humanity that believes the same thing. I have had the conversation with him a number of times, and there seems to be nothing I can do to convince him, to get through to him that this is a problem, that this is our problem. Laying there in the sweat and the heat and the vain hope of a cool breeze, I suppose I felt hopeless because if I can't convince one person—one person whom I actually love, and who loves me—then what are the chances that anything will ever happen? And so, in my hopelessness on that sweltering night, I got angry.

So when I read these words from James today—"Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; your anger does not produce God's righteousness." —I can't help but think of that hot, angry night and hear James speaking right to me, right to us.

Outrage is ubiquitous. With all that is going on—the pandemic, the long-overdue reckoning around racial justice, the recent discoveries of mass graves at Native American boarding schools, the climate change crisis, the refugee crisis, the homelessness epidemic—there is plenty to be outraged about. There is so much happening in our world that should be easily solved if we could only agree on how to do it.

I think there are a lot of us who can relate to my story. We've all got examples of friends or relatives or acquaintances with whom we've had similar conversations to the ones I've had with my father-in-law; or, more often than not, with whom we've avoided similar conversations. When we know that we disagree, when we know that we're not going to change one another's minds or accomplish anything other than starting a fight, it's hard to justify bringing anything up. Outrage is so pervasive we get burnt out on it; but if we don't talk about these things, nothing changes.

Speaking as a straight, White, cis-gendered man, I have to say it feels like a very privileged thing for me to be able to say that "my anger doesn't bring God's righteousness," especially when nothing else has brought God's righteousness, either: not logic or reason, not science or research, not empathy, not the legal system or the education system or the political system. When injustice persists, when real people are suffering from the ignorance or the inaction of those in power, how can one not get angry?

But I notice that James doesn't say, "don't get angry." He says, "be slow to anger." Sometimes anger is justified, and sometimes it is helpful and even necessary. But the next thing he says is also true: our anger does not bring about God's righteousness.

Anger, just like the fears and mistrusts and greeds and hatreds that cause these problems in the first place, is something that comes from within us. Jesus reminds his disciples today that it is those things that come from within us, things like theft and murder and envy and pride, that defile us.

To "defile" literally means to "make common." The Pharisees questioned Jesus about why his disciples ate with "common hands," which is to say, hands not purified by washing. As God's chosen people, they were expected to purify themselves as God is pure. It was a physical reminder of who they were, and of whose they were. What Jesus explains to the Pharisees is that we can't make ourselves pure or impure, clean or unclean, sanctified or defiled. Our anger, like anything else that comes from within, regardless of its intent, is not able to make us or anything else godly.

In my anger, I wish that I could somehow make my father-in-law (whose name, by the way, is also James) and everyone else who believes what he does to come around to my way of thinking. I wanted to assert power over them to make them like me. The intent may be good, but, as the old proverb reminds us, the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. It is the good intentions of generations of colonizers and oppressors to "subdue the earth" and "tame the savages" and bring peace and order that got us to where we are; it is the unbridled belief that I am

right and the opposition is wrong that has created the problems with which we now struggle. How can the anger that created the problems also solve them?

What I notice in the gospel story is that the “human traditions” Jesus talks about are most often used to differentiate. They separate clean from unclean, right from wrong, virtuous people from wicked ones. It is from outside of these “human traditions” that Jesus comes; and it’s Mark who notices that what he says declares all foods clean. Mark notices that, according to Jesus, all foods are the same, all given for nourishment, all capable of giving growth and life. It makes sense; after all, all foods are created by God. Could it be that maybe this also applies to all the people created by God, even the ones who seem to work so hard against God’s own purposes?

I wonder if this isn’t why James counsels us to be quick to listen and slow to speak. It’s easy to demonize the other, to imagine that only malice or stupidity or genetic malfunction could possibly make a person so wicked, but this is an assumption made in ignorance. I’m not suggesting that maybe White Nationalism or exploitative consumption have merits to which we ought to be open, but have we ever stopped to think about why such destructive belief systems persist in the 21st century? Why so many people adhere to these things so tightly? I wonder if people cling to these idols for the same reasons we cling to our own: because these are the tiny gods whom we have trusted to save us from whatever it is that frightens us. In fact, I wonder if that’s really where my own anger comes from: from feeling threatened when another person disparages the gods in whom I trust.

Even justice itself can become an idol when it causes us to hate and mistrust and fear other people rather than loving them. Love can spark anger, but anger borne out of love is fundamentally different than anger borne out of frustration or a desire to control. That kind of anger is the result of hearing the word, but failing to do it. We can look into the mirror and see the justice, but then we immediately look away and forget that at the core of justice is love. In the heat of that June midnight, I wanted to change the world—for the better, according to me; but it was the heat and my own frustration and hopelessness that bred that anger, not my love for my father-in-law or my home or anything else. I was afraid of death, of extinction, and so I became angry. What becomes plain to me in the light of day is that such anger cannot really bring about God’s righteousness. The best it can do is help me enforce my pale facsimile in its place.

Oddly enough, this is what gives me hope in this story. My anger cannot bring God’s righteousness. In fact, nothing of mine can bring God’s righteousness. Even my best intentions are

so often defiled with selfish desires. Because I cannot bring God's righteousness, I don't have to; I can leave that job to God. And that is precisely what God is doing: in the embodied love of Christ, God is saving not only our world, but our souls. The best thing we can do is join in that love.

But love is not something we can just "do," something that can be taught. One cannot learn how to love more fully; one can only experience it, be opened by it. Not unlike how the stagnant heat of that sweltering June night stoked the embers of my anger, the rain of God's perfect love, when it falls on our parched hearts, sprouts new life and healing.

Listening to one another—not to rebut, but to understand—is one way to love. It has the capacity to bind us together rather than to separate us. It becomes harder to demonize someone whose humanity we have experienced firsthand. It can help us see that, though we have differentiated ourselves and our beliefs and values according to human traditions, the One who made us has made us all One. In Christ, we are all the same. If human action is to divide and separate and differentiate, God's action is to bring together, to reconcile, to unify.

Whether or not we can get our act together in time to prevent our own extinction, I know that our only hope for doing so lies not in demonizing and reviling one another, for that is the way of death, the way of the Empire who crucifies anyone who stands in its way. Ironically, the way to life is the way of the cross, the way of the Crucified. He is the word of truth, implanted in us, with the power to save us.