

Pastor Brian's
Mid Week Message
June 3, 2020

"GONE MAD!"

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for a man's anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." James 1:19-20

Martin Luther labeled the Epistle of James an "epistle of straw". That's because it doesn't appear to contain a whole lot of Gospel, a clear and concise message of God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. It does contain a great deal of teaching on how we are to be formed in Christ; transformed from people who are of the world into those who are and behave as children of God. One of the verses that I memorized years ago is above (it's actually two verses, but they're not all that long). As I watch from a distance, more of a cultural distance than a physical distance, the events that are taking place in cities around the country this week it becomes more and more evident to me that we live in a very angry time! This is nothing new...it's been building for many years. Taking the Word of God as given to us through James, the half brother of Jesus, and applying it today's America you might think that "everyone should be always angry, quick to speak and very slow to ever listen!" The key to what is written at the top of the page is verse 20, *"for a man's (a human's) anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires"*. The question that immediately comes to mind is just what kind of righteousness DOES God desire. He certainly doesn't desire a righteousness that we can acquire of ourselves, even though His perfect law demands it, because we are incapable of ourselves to do anything righteous in His sight, let alone be righteous. What God desires is the righteousness of Christ that is given to those of us who receive Him and believe in His name; that He is who He says He is. This is the righteousness, the perfection, that Christ lived out each and every day of His life and gives to us as a gift of His divine grace. It's the righteousness of faith as that's the only way that it can be received. Therefore, being given that righteousness, how are we to respond...respond to what is happening around us. I think that's what The Epistle of James is all about, how to live out our faith, how to be more and more like Jesus each and every day in our unique situation. Look at the example of Jesus, and let's go right to the idea of anger. Did Jesus ever get angry? You bet he did! But what is key is what He got angry about. Reading the Gospels, along with the rest of the Bible, you'll find that He never got angry over being mistreated by others. Even as He was being beaten, tortured and crucified, to the point of death, He did not become angry. He even interceded for those putting Him to death to be forgiven as they had no idea what they truly were doing. What He did get angry over was the profaning and desecration of His Father's House, the Temple. You might say He even took to violence as that very Temple was *"turned into a den of robbers"* (Matthew 21:3). Jesus was also angered when He saw other people being mistreated, especially the poor and helpless who were oppressed by those who possessed earthly power over them. There are most certainly things going on around us today that must bring our Lord to anger in that respect. In these circumstances His violence only came verbally, as He confronted the powerful with their sinful behavior, but always in love as His heart was on turning them in repentance so that they might receive His forgiveness. In the Sermon On the Mount Jesus implores us to be people who promote peace, His peace. *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."* (Matthew 5:9) That's our calling, to work for peace, and we can do so by first taking the time to listen to what's happening, to all sides of an issue. Then take more time to process what we hear as it relates to the Word of God. Finally, may come time to speak, and in the most extreme of circumstances display anger. *"Blessed are the peacemakers"...*in doing so we'll be blessed, by God. At the same time, we'll *"be called children of God"*. And just who will call us that? God, of course, but don't be surprised if the angry around us don't recognize that peace in us and respond to it as well. That's because we've got the power of God the Holy Spirit working in us and through us!