

No matter how many times we read it, the passage from John's Gospel detailing Jesus' cleansing of the Temple comes as a shock. This is not 'the gentle Jesus meek and mild' that we sang about when I was in Sunday School! This not the Jesus who could on occasion offer a sharp rebuke to those who tried to twist his words or accuse him of blasphemy. Jesus was angry in word **and** deed. Really angry – smoking angry!

Commentators spend a lot of time pondering whether this action occurred early in Jesus' ministry – as in John – or in the final week of Jesus' life as indicated by the other 3 Gospels. That is worth a Bible Study sometime, but today we are mindful that the event happened – and Jesus was more angry than we have ever seen him.

We in Church don't talk about anger much - which doesn't mean we don't feel it. It's just that we often aren't sure how to deal with it.

- Some angry people just leave the Church without saying why
- Some remain with the intent of making life miserable for everyone (not here, of course!)
- Most of us just bury it in that 'anger' file that we try not to open too often.

The Hebrew Scriptures tell us God got angry quite often – even to the point of letting his people be carried off into Exile.

Today we read the 10 Commandments which Moses obtained from God and brought down from Sinai to read to the people. But when he saw what Aaron had been up to with the Golden Calf, he threw the tablets at this desecration. He then had to climb the mountain again and humbly ask if God had kept a second copy.

Of the prophets, Jeremiah was the one who could not control his anger at times. In chapter 7, God is furious at how the people desecrate worship and says through the prophet: **Therefore thus says the Lord God: My anger and my wrath shall be poured out on this place, on human beings and animals, on the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched. (Jer. 20:7)**

Paul, whose murderous anger was quelled in his vision of the Risen Christ, counselled his people: "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger. (Eph. 4:26) Nice to read but hard to do - if you have ever been up at 3:00 am trying to deal with someone who is obviously a moron and totally wrong!

In this time of Pandemic, we are grateful that most Canadians have controlled their anger with all the limitations on life. Frustrated – yes; angry – a bit but not so bad. Yet anger is seen in other ways:

Black Lives Matter; Indigenous Voices; the Homeless; the Addicted by legal prescriptions; the Elderly trapped in Care Homes; their care-givers trapped by low wages; everybody angry at Government and even a few, perish the thought, angry with Dr. Bonnie Henry!

The anger in the US is palpable and dangerous.

You get the point – all is civil, all is calm – except it isn't!

It also makes us shudder at the thought of Jesus physically entering our Churches today. Would he happily sit in the back pew, or would he charge the pulpit and start throwing things around?

What made Jesus so angry?

He said the Temple had become a market place – not a place of true worship.

People were worshipping a building and not the true God.

People had such a skewed vision of God that they could not discern his presence in Jesus.

Can God be so near, so present, so one of us?

I found it interesting when the great Notre Dame Cathedral caught fire in Paris. City authorities want to rebuild it because it was so important historically and to attract tourists. Does anyone worship there?

Sometimes 3 or more generations of a family worked on one of the great cathedrals of Europe never seeing its completion. Was God impressed?

We have built Churches large and small in Canada but how many indigenous people really feel welcome?

Yes, a building is needed for God's family to be together. But is it a building of welcome? Is it a place Jesus would be pleased to visit? Is it a place where Jesus, as poor, Black, Indigenous . . . would be welcome?

In the US, great Churches were built as the nation grew. But it was in the Black Communities in tin shacks, where on a Sunday, Jesus was pleased to dwell.

I came across this quote by Frederick Douglass, a freed slave, who proclaimed these words in 1852 about the glorious 4th of July.

“O! had I the ability, and could reach the nation's ear, I would, to-day, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.”

— from “*What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*” an 1852 speech by Frederick Douglass

Our Churches are emptying and we wonder why?

Then these seem like such old-fashioned words:

Have no other gods before you . . .

Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy . . .

This is the first day of the week – the day to set our compass, our priorities, renew our faith and love, to remember that all we have and all we are is Gift.

It is a day to proclaim God’s Word – “***Behold, I make all things new!***” That includes me and you – a new vision of Emmanuel, of Jesus with us – in the stranger, in the other, **in us**.

That realization can be terrifying – as terrifying as the Cross.

Have no other gods before you . . .

We need to look in our hearts and discern what/who really is our God.

It is a tough thought to end on. But we sometimes make Jesus over into a Mr. Rogers caricature, not really relevant to such an angry world.

But if indeed God is in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, **there is also holy anger in that Jesus**.

Anger with our despoliation of creation; our racism, sexism, our materialism – all the ‘isms’ that try to hide the reality of the living God who, Yes, can get angry.

The Cross represents the world’s anger. God replied with resurrection, consolation, grace and peace. Yes, God’s compassion overcomes God’s anger – but don’t put our God to the test!

Better to know God’s anger than to experience God’s absence.