

Quelling Quarrelling
Mark 9:30-37 and James 3:13-4:8a
19 September 2021 v. website

When I first looked at these lectionary readings, I thought that perhaps I should choose some **other** passages to focus on. I mean, **Mark** implies that there was a heated **rivalry** playing out among the disciples. And surely there's nothing like **that** going on among any of **you**. And **James** is addressing Christians who **plainly** are at war with each other – he speaks of disputes and conflicts, envy... and even murder. And certainly, such things are **far** from **your** experience. So, I **wondered** if these would be the most **appropriate** passages for me to focus on this morning – especially as it's my next to last Sunday here!

On the face of it, maybe not. But **then**, I thought, *Well, you Bon Air folks do get around. You have a **wide** circle of friends out there.* And so, you probably know of **some** congregation where conflict's afoot... **some** disciples who are at each others' throats... some portions of Christ's **body** waging war with each other. So, I decided to **stick** with Mark and James this morning. And now I hope that you will also stick with me... for a few minutes, anyway!

*Those conflicts and **disputes** among you – from **where** do they come?* James asks rhetorically. That is, he **asks** with the intention of **telling** us. Well, James lets us know... it's a little complicated!

Conflicts often have **presenting** issues – two people are fighting about this, although the argument **actually is** about that... and that **actually** happened fifteen years ago, between their parents. Conflicts often come in layers... like a cake. And **because** they do, the **reasons** for conflict are often **layered**... like a cake... only not so sweet!

You **fight**, James says **first**, because you do not **have** something, and you **want** it. You see what someone **else** has, which you do not... and **envy** rises, and jealousy. And bitterness **begins** to grow within your heart... **cankering** there inside of you... until finally it spills over, surges out... and you throw the dart... and the match is on!

But, James alerts us... **peel up the edge** of that **desire** for what you do not or cannot have... and you'll find something else – a **deeper** cause of conflict. In **each** person God has implanted a **spirit**. Now, you'd think that those God-implanted

spirits would stay in **tune** with the One who'd implanted them. **But**, James says, they **don't**. They **turn** toward envious desires. And they not **only** turn **toward** envious desires; they turn **away from** their natural and **appropriate** desire for God... away from the contentment with God they reasonably should feel. The **conflict** between persons UP HERE, AMONG US, you see, is often a result of a **corruption** of the **relationship** with God DOWN HERE, WITHIN US. For the **spirits** within persons, God **ceases** to be **adequate**. Faith fails and trust is broken. Eyes look elsewhere for assurance, validation, power, excitement. Comparisons are made. Insecurity arises. Envy follows... and jealousy. And, before **long**, there's **conflict**.

Conflicts arise when our relationship with God is compromised... corrupted.

But... what **causes** that corruption to occur... deep within persons? Well, there's a **deeper** layer still. There is something **outside** of our spirits that acts **on them...** in such a way... **that** they turn. And we begin to doubt God... to wander from God. Think of Adam and Eve... and of that **other** creature they encountered in Eden.

Then James drives it **home**. The **deepest cause** of **conflict** is the **devil...** or the tempter, as it's also known... subtly, often unconsciously, working... planting pictures in people's minds... developing dissatisfactions... working up harmful appetites, resentments... nurturing attitudes of pride and selfish ambition with a suggestion here, an implication there. So, James would say, you are not simply **fighting** with each **other**. You are being **used**, manipulated, weaponized... turned **into** a weapon in the tempter's **own** war of rebellion. Consciously or unconsciously, you're cooperating with the tempter. That cooperation leads to conflict... to all kinds of dis-chord among disciples... to congregations coming apart... to branches of Christ's family tree flailing against each other... and sometimes breaking off.

We've all seen it. I'm not saying that we've seen it **here**. I'm **just** saying we've seen it. Sadly, terribly, tragically, it happens – **some** would say, **inevitably**.

But **not** James. James is absolutely certain that our internecine conflicts **can** be **quelled**. **Just** as James knows what **causes** conflicts among Christians, he also knows what will **quell** conflict.

Now, maybe it's a little **ironic...** but, **essentially** what James says is, *You must fight!* Not one another, however, but the devil. Resist!! **Recognize** what's going on and who your **true** opponent is. Recognize, **too**, that God... who has given us

our **spirits**... also gives us **grace**... grace that helps us in our **fight**. **Resist** the devil. **Refuse** to cooperate with the tempter. Stand up to him... and he will turn and run from you.

Then, turn yourselves... turn back toward God. Draw **near** to God. Pray for deeper **trust**, for **contentment** with God's provident care for you. Pray for a willing dependence upon God... for alignment with God's will. Pray for contentment. Draw **near** to God, James urges us... and God will draw near to you!

That's what it **takes** for disciples to quell their quarreling!

Well, if you've stuck with me **this** long, I certainly commend you. I know that it's only **theoretically** that any of this concerns you. But, perhaps you know of some **situation** in which conflict is playing out among disciples. Maybe you know of some **persons** who are caught up unawares in cooperating with the tempter. Biff, bopp, boom! And maybe you could **nudge** things just a **bit** toward **peace** by sharing these insights with the combatants... by teaching them what you now know. Of course, the most **effective** teaching is teaching by example. "Show by your good life..."

If we ourselves... all of us... will **resist** the devil... and if **every day** we will draw near to God... quarrels and conflicts should fade like morning fog.

Brothers and sisters, aim for that. And I shall try to, just the same.

And **remember**... and count upon... the powerful grace God supplies for this one good fight.