

Jesus and Black anger (John 2:13-22; Lent 3B)

Who are the other enraged voices crying out from the temple with Christ?

by [Kerry Hasler-Brooks](#)

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I have just finished supervising a year-long undergraduate research project that, among other things, examines anger as a virtue of Christian faith.

The project includes a reading of the well-known scene in the temple from John 2, the unveiled narration of embodied anger, the protesting Christ marching against injustice. The student who authored this project boldly and imaginatively breaches the wall so often erected between the biblical text and other texts. She invites others' anger, specifically the anger of the self-described "Black woman warrior poet" Audre Lorde, to join Jesus' anger in the temple.

As I sit here, the anger is palpable in the biblical account and in the world. So I ask, who are the other enraged voices crying out from the temple with Christ? Who are the Black warrior poets standing alongside the Johannine Jesus, pointing to injustice, and shouting, "Stop!"? Do I hear the voice of Christ in this anger, not only the anger I also voice but the anger I must bear, the anger that names me, my privilege, my Whiteness, my silence? May I let this anger wash over me. May I listen well.

"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

“To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage almost all of the time. . . . It isn't only what is happening to you. But it's what's happening all around you and all of the time in the face of the most extraordinary and criminal indifference, indifference of most white people in this country, and their ignorance.”

— from *“The Negro in American Culture,”* a 1961 interview with James Baldwin, published in *Cross Currents*

“My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, ignoring it, feeding upon it, learning to use it before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight. My fear of anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also.”

— from *“The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism,”* a 1981 lecture by Audre Lorde

“Black women have the right to be mad as hell. We have been dreaming of freedom and carving out spaces for liberation since we arrived on these shores. There is no other group, save Indigenous women, that knows and understands more fully the soul of the American body politic than Black women, whose reproductive and social labor have made the world what it is.”

— from Brittney Cooper's 2018 book *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower*

“We fear that to allow for anger is to become less like you. Let us meet the God of the prophets. For you tell the truth. You hold fury at injustice. You, in embodied anger, flipped the temple tables. Would you help us to become faithful discerners of when to calm and when to rouse? Rejecting that anger which leads to bitterness or hatred of another, yet tapping into a righteous rage when that which you've created is under abuse and neglect. The dignity of creation demands our emotions. Make ours a beautiful rage.”

— from Cole Arthur Riley, @blackliturgies, on July 29, 2020