

Getting Angry At God

One of my favorite passages in Scripture is Jeremiah 20 where the prophet rants at God about all the trouble he's had trying to get God's message through to a stiff-necked people who simply didn't want to listen and subjected poor Jeremiah to a host of indignities and threats of death.

Jeremiah has had enough and he lets God know it. Here's my paraphrase: "You tricked me and, dumb me, I let it happen. I promise myself I'm not going to let that happen one more time. And yet I can't stop myself. Your word is like a burning fire within me and I have to speak it regardless of the cost. It's a constant battle.

With the way I've been treated it would have been better if I had never been born—if I had died in my mother's womb. Cursed be the man who told my father "you have a son."

Wow! Can you really talk to God like that? Can you vent like that to a friend or family member—someone you love and you know loves you? Most of us have safe people we can talk to when it feels like everything is crashing in and smothering us, Can God be one of those safe people?

St. Teresa of Avila certainly thought so. There's the wonderful story told of her traveling on a muddy rocky road and the carriage she was riding in turned over in the mud. She was dirty and wet and more than a little bit angry. After all, she was doing God's work, heading to share God's word with people who wouldn't want to hear it. "If this is the way you treat your friends," she told God, "no wonder you have so few of them!"

Sacrilege or evidence of deep, deep friendship with God? I believe God welcomes that kind of authenticity. It's only with someone with whom you have a strong loving relationship that it is safe enough to let it all hang out and know that you will still be loved. In fact, this kind of honest sharing actually helps intimacy to grow.

When I was working as a therapist I often encountered people whose lives were not at all turning out as they had planned and were filled with rage. I'd asked them if they had ever gotten angry at God. "Oh, no," they'd say in horror. "I could never do that. I get angry at my husband or children or friends, but never at God." When I

suggested that God was certainly big enough to handle their anger, they'd often hesitate or totally disregard the idea. Those who were brave enough to give it a try and put their feelings down in letters to God were many times surprised by what happened. After they unloaded their pain and venom, their anger lost its power over them, they

were more peaceful and most surprising of all, they had a deeper relationship with God.

God wants us to be free enough to share anything, even the yucky stuff. The gospels tell us that Jesus wasn't fond of phonies. In one place he called them "whitened sepulchers full of dead men's bones." Ours is a come-as-you-are God arms stretched wide to welcome us in an ecstatic heavenly embrace, ready to throw a heavenly party because we are truly home, holding nothing back.

Even after his rant, Jeremiah continued to be God's prophet often proclaiming an unwelcome call to repentance. St. Teresa of Avila became a model for spiritual life and a doctor of the church. And we too can become more fruitful disciples.

God desires all of us. God wants us to be open and honest. So bring it on. God can handle it.

—Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate

