

5th August 2020

Screaming

**“The place is very well and quiet,
and the children only scream in a low voice.”**

Lord Byron, in a letter to Lady Melbourne in 1813

The 1st century BC Roman poet, Horace, in his *Epistles*, suggests “anger is a short madness”. We know this when we’re angry, when tensions rise, voices are raised and harsh things are said – and especially when we scream – because most of periods of “short madness” are, indeed, temporary and we regain our equilibrium soon enough. Yet, most of us know how it feels to lose control, when screaming is *not* “in a low voice” like the children with Byron. So what does this “short madness” say of us?

These issues come up regularly in my work with people dealing with loss. For many, loss brings with it periods of intense anger: anger at the medical profession for apparently missing a diagnosis; anger at a family member for saying or doing the wrong thing; anger at a person who has died for ... well ... dying; anger at God for “doing the dirty”. And there may be screaming in there too. Some will apologise, for they are uncomfortable with the intensity their emotions; some will try to suppress their feelings, hold onto control, or dismiss the anger of others, because they are confused by this “short madness” and how it manifests itself.

And me? I say, “Let it happen”, for anger is a deep, natural and honest expression of the rage we sometimes feel. Scream if you must. But also – and hold onto your hats here – it’s OK to be angry with God, and to scream too. If God made us fully human, then he gave us the emotion of anger along with everything else. So, if God wants us to be fully ourselves when we engage with him, he *has* to know what’s real and honest in our lives. Would God want us to hold anything back?

But, we protest, surely it’s an offence to be angry with God, and for God to be complained about and screamed at. Should prayers not be “very well and quiet”, devotional, sweet, gentle? And I say, “No! Not all the time.” God is God and can take our screaming, even “in a low voice”. We are human, so should we not be showing God *all* we are and *all* we feel?

A prayer for today

Lord, my anger is just me being honest. And I know you will understand. Amen.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>