

31st July 2021

Pestered

“So pestered with a popinjay.”

William Shakespeare, Henry IV, Part I

A few days ago, I shared some reflections on the theme of anger. Afterwards, I had the privilege of reading a paper on the sufferings and anger of Job, presented some years ago by the Rev Prof John Gibson, my Old Testament lecturer in Edinburgh's New College – and one of my best ever teachers. At the end of this illuminating piece, John Gibson reflects on the Scots word *deave*, which, he suggests, is close to the word “pester”. If the book of Job is to be believed, he writes, God is happy to be pestered, and “is both able and, indeed, willing to put up with a lot more *deavin'* from his children in the valley of tears than he normally gets from us.”

If that is so, why should we feel we have to hide our anger from God? Does God not want us to be real and honest in our prayers, even to pester him, to *deave* him, just as we are? Can God not take it? I'm not one of Shakespeare's “popinjays”, no *poseur*, and nor was John Gibson. But both of us – if I may, in all humility, associate myself with my former professor – like Job of old, seek to be honest about our relationship with a God who not only copes with our pestering, but actively encourages it.

In a letter to the Duke of Mantua, written in Venice in 1537, the artist Tiziano Vicellio, better known to us as Titian, lays out some of his troubles. He talks about pictures he has sent the Duke and others being prepared. And he pleads for release from a financial obligation which is causing him distress, complaining vehemently about an issue ...

*which ... creates not a little trouble and disturbance
because of the persons with whom I am pestered,
out of whose hands your Excellency alone can save me ...*

We cannot and should not create from our own feelings an understanding of God. I'm with Titian, for example. I can't stand being pestered. But the God to whom we come in prayer isn't like us, irritated by the vagaries of the human condition. Here is a God who *wants* to be pestered. So, who are we to decline such an offer?

A prayer for today

*Sorry, Lord. I'm at it again, pestering you once more.
But you promise me your peace. After all, that's why I'm here, isn't it? Amen*

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