

16th October 2023

Anger

"There are things that must evoke our anger to show we care. It is what we do with that anger. If we direct that energy, we can use it positively ..."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *'Daily Express' interview, 2008*

I love "hero" Bible stories, the exploits of the people of faith, like the account of Elijah and Elisha, around Elisha's "commissioning" or call. We're told in the 2 Kings 2 that Elijah is "taken upon into heaven" and his "mantle falls on Elisha". Good stuff! But when you dig into this story it comes out differently, for instead of it only being the dramatic "mantle" part, it is, in fact, an account of the naturalness of grief, the heart-rending responses of a young man whose prophet-mentor has died. Here's what happens.

First of all, Elisha is told that Elijah is going to die. "I know," he replies, "but I don't want to hear it." Here is the disbelief of the "bad news" and the unwillingness to explore it further. Then, Elisha tells Elijah, "I will never leave you." I'll be with you to the very end, he's saying – a promise he may not be able to keep. A second time he's told Elijah will die. And once again he reacts in the same way, powerless to do it any differently.

In time, Elijah dies in dramatic fashion, and Elisha is bereft. So what does he do? The mantle of the prophet has fallen on him. Succession is secured. But instead of acceptance, he takes the cloak, and in his anger, he tears it in two. He gives himself spontaneously, and naturally, to the lamentation I spoke of yesterday. And as if *that* isn't enough, he goes down to the river and thrashes the water with his cloak, crying out in the agony of grief, "Where are you, God? Where is the God of Elijah now?"

Finally, when he returns to his friends and tells them of Elijah's death, they try to console him by saying, "No! It couldn't have happened. You're the man now. And anyway, perhaps Elijah's still out there, and he'll come back soon." But it's not to be, and Elisha begins to accept his loss.

The "mantle of Elijah had fallen on Elisha ..." Yes indeed! A Cecil B de Mille epic-drama! But here, more importantly, is humanity, the stages of grief, if you like, including honest expressions of anger and distress ... Here are people just like me, with faith and human emotion, acceptance and anger, obedience and distress, all wrapped up together – thank God!

A prayer for today

Lord, you bless me with emotions,

and now I give them back to you in my honest prayers. Amen

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