

Biblical Cries: "Go Ahead and Yell"

I once had a friend whose favorite exclamation of surprise or dismay was: "for crying out loud!" She herself was quite good at it, and the Bible is certainly all for it - "for crying out loud" that is. The Bible is really quite a noisy book anyway - howling winds, roaring floods, cracking lightening, distant thunder, hissing snakes, braying asses, roaring lions, even bleating lambs - not to mention - harps twanging, bugles blowing, cymbals clashing.

But - by far - the most of all noise in the Bible - is made by the loud voices of men and women. There are battle songs, dirges, wedding songs, taunting songs, hymns of all sorts. And then there is what can only be called a really old noise. There is nothing exactly like it in the religious literature of any other people. It is a loud, inarticulate cry of pleasure or of pain, ranging all the way from a shout of joy (making a happy "noise before the Lord") (Psalm 98:6) to a shriek of horror ("when the wounded scream.") (Ex 25:15) You see when they are glad and when they were sad - Biblical folk "cried mightily with a strong voice." (Rev. 18:2) Not reticent - not restrained - he expressed his feelings and his faith - with a yell, a cry, he whoops with joy - he yowls with pain. It is as though God said to men and women "I am all for crying out loud." You live in a real world, so give vent to your real feelings; and I will hear your cry and come to you." It's as though God - exactly the opposite of Archie Bunker says: "Don't stifle it!"

Let it all out - may be this is why there were so few Biblical neurotics. For this "crying out loud" is first of all facing the facts as they are. There is pleasure in life and there is pain - and each must be expressed in its turn and some things simultaneously. (ambivalence) No use pretending. Only silly gadflies pretend life is all pleasure, and only soured hypochondriacs and misanthropes pretend it is all pain.

So no more play-acting. Give vent to your true feelings. How God must wince at both our lying laughter and our imaginary pains. There is enough true pleasure and hurting in this world to cry happy or cry havoc over without making things up. Therefore once they faced that real world - Biblical folk did not hesitate to give vent to their real feelings about it.

When the Jew had good reason to yell, he didn't suppress it. "The children of Israel moaned by reason of the bondage and they yelled." Ex. 2:23) No mistake about it. If things went wrong - the old Jew thought it was his right - nay - his duty to out with it - to get it off his chest. The 142nd psalmist is in dire need. Listen to him - does he keep it to himself and go insane? Not a bit of it - instead he says "I cry with my voice to the Lord ...I pour out my complaint...I tell my trouble...when my spirit is faint, thou

knowest..." (Psalms 142:1-3) Hear those verbs – I “cry” – “pour out” – “tell” – “I let somebody know.”

You see, the old Jew never wore a mask, so he seldom went mad. His cry was open and honest. His practice was – “Are you hurt? – Are you happy? - Then out with it! Go ahead and yell!” Too often, we restrained Presbyterians become hermetic, especially when life is harsh or horrible; we clam up – we seal up our pains, bottle up our tensions inside us, stoically refuse - to use the Psalm’s verbs – to “pour out” our legitimate complaints, refuse to “tell” our real troubles to anyone, and even when we grow faint with fear, we are ashamed to let anyone “know.”

But suffering in silence is often stupid. One can build so high a wall between one’s self and one’s neighbor that one is trapped behind it. People who mistrust the outside world so much that they never let down their guard, never open up, who feel so menaced that they must always keep their armor up, must sooner or later either turn to jelly or explode.

Listen - when you are in need – do not hesitate to talk – cry out loud – to someone who is in a position to help you. This does not mean that you blabber your troubles to everyone in sight (Aunt Lonimie ? – “God only knows...”) – but it does mean you should seek out the person qualified to give ear and heart and sensible guidance: a member of your family – your doctor, your minister, one friend whose confidence you can trust and talk to – for God’s sake.

Even children – (though they should not be allowed to get their way by temper tantrums) - should not be bottled up and never allowed to “hoop and holler” or never scream and cry. Some cranky individual asked me the other day what that dreadful din down the hall was – and I said, “It is the nursery children making a noise unto the Lord.” That changed the conversation. I know it hurts – go ahead and yell. Another thing - it is wrong to tell a blubbering little boy “that big boys don’t cry” – for big boys do cry and ought to when they have something to cry about. There are better ways to dry a little fellow’s tears than to make him ashamed of expressing his feelings – and if adults were less ashamed – less afraid to lose their artificial security – they might less often lose their sanity.

Even some prayers ought to be shouted. Biblical saints never simper before God – they strike at heaven’s doors, pound, like the importunate widow in Jesus’ parable. Devotions should often be demanding. For the Psalmists, meditation was seldom mild. They give vent in rather violent tones to their real feelings before God, shaking their fist at heaven and arguing heatedly their causes. In I Samuel, when Hannah whispers her

prayers, it is presumed she is drunk, from too much wine. (Note: Don Camillio – laughing with his Christ and arguing with him) God can't understand mumblers. At least our Lord himself never whimpered. "In the days of his flesh he offered up prayers and supplications with (what? Weak words? No!) strong crying and tears."

Finally to quote the 34th Psalm, "this poor man cried, and the Lord heard...and delivered." The Biblical motion is that a believing man's cry has been met by the answering cry of his God, and the man knows he does not cry alone – that at the heart of the universe there is a warm response – a holy companion – in whom he can confide, and on whom he can rely – for guidance, for courage, forever.

O Lord – looking back to last year – we know there's quite enough dismay at disaster and death - "for crying out loud" – help us in the new year to face the real world – give vent to our real feelings and the tenderness and courage to hear others crying and to bring help – even as thou, Oh Lord dost help us all. Amen