



ST ALBANS

An Angry Jesus

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Back in September we had a large dumpster parked in our driveway for a couple of weeks. We're renovating our kitchen and of course the first step in a reno is demolition. Hugo is almost two and he loves trucks and machines. I hoped he'd be there when the time came to see the huge dumpster being loaded on the truck to be taken away.

The day came and he and I were out for a walk with Evelyne. We were almost home when I saw the Mr. Dumpster truck coming down the street. Oh good timing! As we approached our house, the Mr. Dumpster guy backed his truck up to the dumpster, blocking our street. He got out of the truck to start hooking up the dumpster. Just as he did this, a woman driving a BMW came around the corner and had to stop because the truck was blocking the street. The moment she pulled up, she laid on the horn. Like not a friendly toot-toot. More of a beeeeeeeeeep. And then she rolled down her window and started swearing a blue streak at the Mr. Dumpster driver. She got out of the car, walked up to him and started yelling some more.

It all happened so quickly. One second I was thrilled that Hugo was going to be able to see this truck in action, the next we were in this highly conflictual situation. Effing this and effing that. Evelyne and I were shocked. Why was she so upset? She just pulled up. I approached her and gently said: "It's not going to take him long, he's almost done. If you're in a rush you can go around the block, it's not far." She didn't know this was my house because I was across the street at this point. Then my husband and our contractor came out of the house to see what was going on. She proceeded to yell at them: "why did you hire this effing idiot?"

Nothing I or they could say could calm her down. She was just so angry. After about 10 f bombs, I said, look, my children are here, do you mind not swearing so much? And she shouted at me: "I'm sorry I'm not in control here, I'm having a panic attack, I'm not controlling my actions!"



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Eventually the dumpster driver finished the job. From start to finish, it couldn't have taken him more than 2 minutes. She got back in her car and sped off, tires squealing. Those two minutes left me and Evelyne shaken up for the rest of the day. We had been first-hand witnesses to her angry outburst. All we could say to each other was, well, I guess she was having some kind of bad day before this happened. The size and power of her anger just did not seem to fit this situation. This being momentarily delayed by a dumpster pick up. It seemed to me that this incident was just the straw that broke the camel's back for her that day.

“Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.” PAUSE. Was this the straw that broke the camel's back for Jesus that day? We don't often see these kinds of displays of anger from Jesus in the Gospels. Was this just his being human? Losing it on those who were buying and selling in the Temple because he had just had enough?

Immediately before this story in the Gospel of Matthew comes the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey. We hear it on Palm Sunday. Jesus' triumphant entry into the holy city, with crowds shouting Hosanna. Jesus has been trying to explain to the disciples that he's not the Messiah they think they're waiting for. He's not coming in with armies and military might, defeating the oppressor in a spectacular fashion. Instead, he has to be betrayed, arrested, tortured and killed at the hands of those same authorities. Maybe the parade was just too much and the money changers in the Temple was just the straw that broke the camel's back. They were the Mr. Dumpster guy for Jesus that day.

Or maybe, Jesus' anger was very different. Maybe it had no resemblance to the woman's in the BMW that day. Her anger seemed quite pointless, to be honest. All it did was upset Evelyne, and me, and the Mr. Dumpster guy too, I would guess. Her rage and threat of violence felt like a pointless attack against a guy just trying to do his job. Jesus' anger, on the other hand, was something entirely different.

The Bible has a lot of stories featuring angry people. I looked it up, and the word “anger” is used 322 times in the New Revised Standard Version. “Angry” is used



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another 118 times. The first reference to anger is Esau's anger against his brother Jacob. Moses' anger causes him to smash the tablets on the mountainside. Jonah gets angry at God for cursing the people of Nineveh. There are dozens of psalms that mention anger, but somehow only one gets quoted on gift shop plaques: "Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath" (Ps 37:8). Jesus is angry at the religious authorities for being hard of heart when they question why he is healing on the sabbath (Mk 3:5). Actually most of the time that anger is mentioned, it's God who gets angry. So sometimes anger in the Bible is something to be praised, and sometimes it's something to avoid.

Modern psychology agrees with this. That anger can be both good and bad, destructive and constructive.¹ Destructive anger can eat away at us. "When people respond to situations with anger, there's usually more to the story. Behind their rage is a fear of being hurt, a fear of not being able to stand up for themselves, or a fear of unjust or unfair things happening."² This can often manifest itself in destructive anger. Where unresolved hurt, insecurity, fear can cause a lashing out at innocent bystanders, just as the woman in BMW demonstrated.

Constructive anger, on the other hand, is driven by a deep injustice, a boundary transgressed, a need for change. It's this constructive anger that Jesus is demonstrating in the Temple.

Today we celebrate the feast of the dedication. It's a day to give thanks for the building in which we worship, but also for our community proper. Why do we hear the story of the cleansing of the Temple? It's because we're being invited to rethink our priorities. We're being invited to get constructively angry about practices within our community that are unjust. We're also being invited to avoid or healthily process destructive anger that can eat away at us and cause us to lash out at others. The tough part is discerning which is which. Amen.

Question for Open Space: What are some ways we can discern between destructive and constructive anger?

¹ <https://sojo.net/articles/christianity-makes-room-rage>

² <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/your-emotional-meter/202102/how-rethink-and-manage-anger>