

The day of my sister's senior prom was the same day I discovered my bee allergy.

My whole family was dressed to the nines, taking her prom photos in the park, when I felt myself get stung. There were hives, dizzy spells, blurry vision, nausea, and within 20 minutes my dad and I were on the way to the ER. He dropped me off at the entrance and went to park, leaving me to stumble in and try to check in on my own.

It's crucial to remember that your favorite hapless intern is partially deaf, and heavily relies on lip-reading to communicate. So here I am, in the ER waiting room, my vision blurred and my hearing worse. It's what I like to call a full-on Helen Keller situation.

I go up to the blurry shape who might be the receptionist, and things only get worse. The receptionist is bored, rude, and does not seem particularly sympathetic to my plight. He refuses to let me take a seat until I answer his questions. My tongue is swelling up, so speaking is an issue, and there's this whole funny bit where he can't understand me, I can't understand him, and he's calling interpreters on the phone to try and figure out what language I speak, because clearly English isn't working out for us.

Throughout this whole encounter, I'm being *painfully* polite. Turns out I'm more afraid of social judgement than I am of potential anaphylactic shock. I'm calm, I'm compliant, I call him sir with every breath. I apologize approximately every thirty seconds and feel genuinely awful for having the gall to disturb his waiting room, even if he is being hateful and I have every right to get upset. My lifelong commitment to keeping the peace outweighs the sheer rage I'm feeling bubble up inside me.

In comes my father.

He bursts through the door, takes in the situation, and becomes Angry. His kid had been mistreated, an injustice had occurred, and he was not going to stand for it. I have no memory of

what he actually said, but it must have been powerful, because we bypassed the receptionist and were in a room within ten minutes. This whole scenario proves the power of a good, old-fashioned bout of righteous fury.

Anyway, now I carry an epipen, so that's something.

The Amos reading today also speaks to rage against injustice. Here we have a classic prophetic message of divine wrath against people who have committed atrocities, and I have to admit, it makes me a little uncomfortable. Being a lesbian from the rural south has often exposed me to the kind of hellfire-and-brimstone rhetoric that can be so incredibly damaging to all of us, and particularly to those of us who are members of marginalized communities. Many of us were taught that anger is meant to be directed at us, and that we were not allowed to respond in kind. When confronted with rudeness, unfair treatment, or straight-up injustice, we were trained to keep our heads down, apologize, and disguise any kind of emotional reaction. In fact, funny story: When I was in middle school and I found someone annoying or rude, I would start writing these funny little poems in my head. That way, I could focus on finding rhymes, and display no outward reaction to whatever was happening. Isn't that wild, an eleven year old already afraid of displaying emotion?

So then, especially for people who are used to receiving anger from others, and unused to being able to react or to resist, these passages where God actively rages against the people can be damaging, painful, and downright terrifying. We are led to believe that holy anger is meant to condemn and to punish, rather than to advocate and to defend. Too often, tales of divine wrath are horribly misused as a kind of scare tactic; designed to keep us afraid and compliant, following instructions without question. And when people are afraid to ask questions, it is far too easy for corrupt systems to take advantage of the powerless, trapping people in cycles of poverty, racism, and other forms of injustice.

In fact, let's look at what God is angry at here. It is interesting to note that most of the "evil deeds" listed, such as "practicing deceit with false balances," and "buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals," actually refer to forms of economic injustice. All of the actions listed are designed to trap the poor and the powerless in a cycle of poverty, while enriching those who are already part of the wealthy elite. Imagine a biblical game of Monopoly, where the richer you are, the easier it is to take from others. The individual people who are able to manipulate this corrupt system to their own advantage are certainly in the wrong, but there is something greater at hand: a deeply flawed system which allows such injustices to take place at every level of society. God's anger is directed not only at individual mistakes, but rather at a broader culture of systematic oppression. Of course, this particular brand of economic justice remains particularly relevant today, as we navigate a society in which a tiny subset of the population controls a massive portion of economic resources. And I think it is important for us to remember how we participate in, and even benefit from, these systems of inequality.

But after all that, here's the good news. According to Amos, we worship a God who is positively enraged by injustice. Enraged on the behalf of all people who are victimized by systems that privilege the voices of just a few wealthy elite over the rest of society. And how cool is it to have a God who wants to take an active part in helping us create a better, and fairer world? A God who loves us enough to display open wrath when God sees some of us mistreated? We have a God who does not want us to live in a world in which we take advantage of corrupt systems at the expense of marginalized peoples, but rather to work towards a system in which all are equal.

And, then, if we worship and serve a God who actively rages against injustice, does that not give us permission to be angry, and to display that anger? And not only on our own behalf, but on behalf of the rest of humanity? In fact, what if someone else in this story had reacted

with appropriate outrage when they saw their fellow people being mistreated? And what if that person had then begun working to *change* this culture of systematic inequality? I think the outcome of the story could have been entirely different.

Of course, we have to be so, so careful not to let anger consume us, and to take over our lives. Because anger is a double-edged sword, and it is far too easy to let it cloud our minds and keep us from making healthy decisions. But anger, when used productively, can be powerful beyond belief. Like my father's wrath, which solved the problem in a way my polite, almost subservient attitude never could, sometimes anger can be just the spark we need to get things done, and done quickly.

I have to admit, I'm not always the best at open confrontation. In fact, I'm not quite sure why I'm the one trying to tell you to embrace healthy expressions of anger, because I'm sure every single person in this congregation is better at it than me! I still apologize every thirty seconds, and I still cringe when I think someone might think me less than perfectly polite and charming. But, recently, I have challenged myself to do something productive with my rage rather than simply containing it. Now, instead of writing limericks in my head, I call my senators and give them a piece of my mind (10/10 would recommend as a way to let out some pent-up aggression). I have found that it can be surprisingly freeing to speak up when I feel that I am being mistreated, or to advocate on behalf of a friend. And so in the coming weeks, I want to challenge all of us, myself included, to allow ourselves to feel and to express anger in a way we haven't before. Because, as I found out in the ER waiting room, perhaps a good healthy dose of righteous fury is just what the doctor ordered.