

Mocking Words

Scripture Reading — 2 Kings 2:23-25

*Some boys came out of the town and jeered at him. "Get out of here, baldy!" they said.
—2 Kings 2:23 —*

Bethel, which means "house of God," was named by Jacob when he had a vision and received a promise from God (Genesis 28:17-19). In Elisha's day Bethel was the house of a false god—a golden calf set up there by King Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:25-33; 2 Kings 10:29).

At the outskirts of Bethel, Elisha is mocked by a group of boys. What happens is not pretty. Angered by their teasing, Elisha curses them. Wild bears come out of the forest and maul 42 of them. Is Elisha just a vain man who doesn't like to be reminded of his lack of hair? What is going on?

The "boys" are teenage apprentices to the priests serving the golden calf. "Go away," they threaten, "or else!" Baldy? They could be mocking Elisha's head shaved in grief for Elijah (see Numbers 6:9). In any case, this is not a playful group of children but a gang of thugs. To mock another human being is to insult someone made in the image of God, precious to the Creator. To mock God's prophet, though, is even worse, directly insulting the Lord.

We don't know if Elisha saw his curse fulfilled or if he was long down the road to Mount Carmel by the time the bears carried out God's justice.

Prophets are people of healing. But they also must stand against evil and the powers of darkness in this world—and name them for what they are. Do you name the evil you see—and rebuke it?

Prayer

Lord of all, you are a God of compassion and a God of justice. Help us to be agents of both in your world. Amen.

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