

The Fire in Our Bones

Jeremiah 20: 7-9

O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I must cry out; I must shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

A pastor friend was called to her first church. It was a small church where for the first three months of her calling she had to conduct twelve funerals. If we do the math that is one beloved saint every week. Needless to say she didn't have much time to do anything else. As the losses piled up, she began to wonder out loud, "Is this what God has called me for?" It is a Jeremiah moment. A moment where we are wooed into the new adventure of our calling only to realize the calling isn't quite what we expected.

Have you ever had a Jeremiah moment before? A moment where you followed what deep down you felt was God's calling only to wonder, "Is this what God has called me to do?" If you were in the service field during the pandemic, it was a time where stress levels were high, and resources were low. Researchers called the pandemic period the great resignation where almost half of service workers—including pastors—threw up their arms and said, "Enough, this isn't what I've been called to do!" Or imagine Dr. King's journey: the road to justice paved with bricks floating through the windows. His children answering the phone to receive death threats. Crosses burning brightly on the front lawn. There were times he wondered, "Is this really what God is asking me to do?" You know traveling down the highway there are a lot of billboards saying, "Jesus is the answer to all the problems." Except, often our calling has these Jeremiah moments which are full of problems, and we wonder to God, "Is this what you've called me to do?"

There's poor Jeremiah. Alone and confused. Stuck in a system which doesn't want to hear what he has to say. He's heard God tell him that God knew him even in the womb; counted the hairs on his head. Jeremiah is following his vocational path only to be ridiculed and dismissed as *loco in la cabeza!* As Jeremiah reads the direction his society is headed, he speaks out. Except, there are alternative facts swirling in the air as well. Jeremiah sounds the alarm, but the people are swept up in collective delusions and conspiracy theories, even if it is to their own destruction. Aren't we glad *that doesn't happen anymore!* Rather than hearing the truth about what is coming, the people preferred false fantasies of security and control. So Jeremiah begins to wonder: *am I a sane person in an insane world, or am I insane in a sane world; or am I insane in an insane world? Is this my calling or should I keep it all to myself because maybe I really am loco in la cabeza.* Maybe we wonder the same thing sometimes.

Yet. Yet, there is this fire within us. A fire in our bones which keeps burning inside of us asking us to speak up. A fire which says, we can't regress backwards. We can't stand on the sidelines while our people are afraid and under attack. We can't ignore an overheating planet. We have become aware of too much. The fire within us has grown more empathetic and curious, more compassionate and alive. The fire in us makes us more connected to God and creation, more connected to our neighbor and to ourselves. We can't help it. It's who we are. We don't need to read the paper to sense something is wrong with our world. We feel it in the air. We know the anxious energy surging all around us. We sense the heightened violence and the shadows growing darker. We know if we sit still and quiet, we will not have a collective future. God has called us to speak prophetically as a church. And yes, sometimes it is too much. Which is why Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. Don't allow the naysayers to silence or desensitize us. Shout my love and compassion from the rooftops!" There is fire within us, can you sense it? A fire which makes us so in tune we can't stay quiet. *Tenemos que hacer algo!* We have to do something! So the question: are we crazy? Are we *loco en la cabeza* like Jeremiah? Maybe. Probably. But here's the thing: we have a health care system where 60% of those who have health insurance can't afford to use it—how do we allow this to happen? We have magistrates who gerrymander neighborhoods of color in order to stay in control while keeping us divided and segregated—how do we allow this to happen? We have legislatures writing bills against our humanity—grown adults attacking children and their families. Now, who are the crazy ones really? The ones crying out about the violence and destruction? Or the ones doing the violence and destruction without accountability?

You see, what I think we've learned as a church since the pandemic is that we can lean into who we are: we can start to learn Spanish and do bilingual bulletins and love on undocumented immigrants, embracing them a part of our family. And what happens? Something ignites and the fire within us grows. We can create a safe space for trans folx, trans youth and their families and what happens? Something ignites and the fire within us grows. We can hang a Black Lives Matter banner, or an affirming banner, or walk in the Pride parade and what happens? Something ignites and the fire within us grows. So are we the crazy ones? Maybe. Probably. But there is a fire within us which can't be extinguished. And really, which is crazier? Doing the things we've been called to do? Or not doing the things we've been called to do, allowing the violence and destruction to continue?

Perhaps we call it the gift of the Holy Spirit. Or an empathic sensitivity. Or maybe we call it the fire in our bones. Whatever it is, we will keep the fire growing. It's in us and who we are. We can't help it. So if there is a fire in your bones, don't ignore it. Don't deny it. Don't call it crazy. Affirm it, let it ignite, and we will keep fanning those flames. For what is it, if we don't speak out and work for the things that truly matter?