

Kate felt a “Burning Fire in the Bones” as she was delivering this message on Sunday, June 25th. The lectionary readings were Jeremiah 20:7-13, Psalm 69:7-18 and Matthew 10:24-39. She would love to hear what your experience is of not NOT being able to speak something and its consequences.

On Thursday, the phone rang. It was Polly wondering what the readings were for today. She had missed Nancy’s call. After I gave them to her, she said “Oh, that’s a lot of reading.” And I said, “And wait till you see what they are! And **I** have to preach about them!” We decided we’d face them together. Actually, we all have to face them: A reading that suggests that if we accept Jesus’ teachings, there is going to be a good deal of **conflict** in our closest relationships; a faithful Psalmist who speaks of **alienation** from mothers, so much so that they are enemies; and a prophet who speaks of the **suffering** of the righteous and is ridiculed for delivering God’s message.

Very few people come to the church looking for conflict, alienation, and suffering. We look for healing, for community, for inspiration. Yes, we want to do ministry, but we do not expect punishment for it. One of the things Joel and I have often said to members is that when you volunteer for something, may it be something that gives you joy. If you feel burdened or frustrated by it, perhaps it is not your calling. And then...here come these readings! Jeremiah who is persecuted for what he preaches, even by his friends. The Psalmist who is insulted for speaking the Word of God. And Jesus who tells us not only about family fractures that may occur by listening to him, but about losing your life for his sake. Not much joy in that.

Now have you noticed the difference between the first half and the second of the worship service today? We started with Barbara Kemp’s lovely music, moved to sweet praise of creation, and a much loved song of morning beauty, to the joy of living the present moment, where our hearts are open to God. And then...part II. Our ears are nearly assaulted by Jeremiah’s words: “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.” And the Psalmist: “It is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother’s children.” And we are shocked by Jesus: “Do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword!”

My immediate desire is to gather Jeremiah, the Psalmist and Jesus to listen to Barbara’s music! But they, whether consciously or not, have breathed in the divine Spirit, and it has given them, in Jeremiah’s words, a “burning fire in their bones.” They **cannotnot** speak the urgent, even sometimes dangerous, word of God. It has to get out, even though it will lead to mockery, hatred, and to judgment. On the other hand, it may lead to sparking a fire in another’s bones...and another’s...and another’s.

I was a child when I first began listening for God. I thought I was told to become a nun. Surrounded by silence and beauty, I would live in prayer and study, and I would write. I would live a holy little life, perhaps cloistered and disconnected from the rest of the world. But as my world got bigger, and my study of scriptures deeper, I realized that Jesus was a man steeped in prayer, and that his prayer always, **always** led him back into the world. Our prayer, as we are learning in the Circle of Presence, always, **always** leads us to deeper connection with God, ourselves and each other. Prayer is presence! And when you are fully present, your heart and your love expands so that **nothing and no one is out of the reach of your concern.**

A regular practice of prayer fosters a deep connection with **all of the living**, a bond that is not mitigated by the culture’s demand to keep things separate. The Word of God comes not solely as comfort, but as a **sword that pierces right through all lies** that we have been taught to settle for. Such as “You are only responsible for your own family,” and “every person is born with a fair shake in life.” It makes sense that

Jesus did not come to bring peace, at least until all injustice on this earth was eradicated. Today, I suspect, Jesus would have carried a “Black Lives Matter” sign, angering many with its painful truth that evil is still perpetrated on one race by another while we blithely go about believing that all of that is in the past. He would have been mocked or told with condescension that “All lives matter.” Such a lovely thing to say but he would have known it misses the point. In our society some lives **are** still valued more than others. And with his bones burning, he could not **not** speak the truth.

If we were to read all of Psalm 69, we may conclude as scholars have that the author has been struck down with some kind of wound or illness. Little compassion was shown the sick in Jeremiah’s or Jesus’ day. People were blamed for their own illnesses which were thought to be due to their sin. We shake our heads and find that a pretty primitive way of thinking, don’t we? Or **do we**? Today’s health care debate shows about as much compassion and understanding for the sick as does the Psalmist’s world. Only now, the sin is in being poor. We only deserve how much or as good health care as we can afford.

The Psalmist cries, “I looked for pity, but there was none. For comforters, but I found none.” What strikes me is that many of those who would deny good health care options for the poor, are the very **same** people who would do anything, anything at all, to relieve the suffering of those close to them. These are **not** heartless people. But they have yet to expand their heart’s circle of care in which the Word of God pierces through and demands compassion. Once this happens, the burning starts and **no one’s suffering is tolerable**.

Jeremiah speaks: “...within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.” As a child, I hoped for a life of peace and beauty, remaining intensely present to God. For knowing one is embraced by God leads to an inner joy that nothing can match. However, once God has you, you find that there is **no buffer** between your little life and the life of the rest of the world, your personal suffering and the

suffering of all. For what is God’s burden, becomes your burden and God’s pain becomes your pain. God’s love, your love. This becomes the burning fire that cannot hold in.

And for it, you will be mocked. You will be insulted and dismissed as unforgivably idealistic or partisan, from every side of every aisle. But in God, there are no sides, no aisles, no lives that are expendable. That is our doing. We draw those lines. In prayer, God just erases them. In silence, we are all beloved, deserving, and worthy. When we know that, we can no longer play an either-or game.

One of these days soon, there will be a generation coming after us...who will shake their heads at the primitive way we humans have divided up our world between us and them, by race, by politics, by creed, just as we shake our heads at the thought world of the ancients about illness and sin. It will make little sense. How will we get there? We will listen to music. We will pray. We will be silent. And we will hear God beckoning us beyond our crude ways of categorizing each other. Our bones will burn. And we will wonder...what were we thinking? Amen.

What

are

we

thinking

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