



The **FIRE** *of* **HIS** **LOVE**

Discover your way
to overcome the
causes of division.

by DEACON JIM MCFADDEN

War, national crisis and polarization, political power plays, and civic turmoil—no, I’m not talking about our current moment, but what the 6th century (B.C.) prophet Jeremiah was enduring. In the midst of this chaos, Jeremiah had incurred the wrath of those in power because he had advocated that the people surrender to their enemy, the Chaldeans.

Lend your Ears

Why would he offer such an outlandish option? The political authorities and their followers had given their allegiance to pagan powers rather than trusting in God and, as a result, were suffering the

consequences for their misplaced allegiance. So, Jeremiah was advocating that they suffer the predictable outcomes of their bad choices and begin the process of spiritual conversion and renewal. The political leaders and military, however, did not want to listen to Jeremiah, and they considered his prophecy an act of treason punishable by death. So, the princes seized Jeremiah and threw him into a cistern to die from starvation. Jeremiah was compelled to speak in God's name, and the people didn't like it. He paid the price.

Why did the people not listen to the prophet who was a spokesperson for God? Why did they prefer to believe in their political leaders with their misguided and corrupt policies instead? Many years ago in his *Slow Train Coming* album Bob Dylan put it this way: "It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody." We don't like our devils, our God-substitutes exposed and renounced. We get anxious and fearful, protective, and angry. We get very defensive, so we seek comfort in our cultural and political tribes who reinforce what we want to hear and seek safety from those who appeal to our fears, anxieties, and insecurities. Fear and resentment have a very seductive power. It can feel easier to believe the worst about ourselves and our world. But this tension can feel unbearable, so we rely upon someone to rescue us. We hear from autocratic demagogues: "I alone can fix it." This fear and insecurity takes its toll, chipping away our self-esteem, rendering us timid, and eroding our sense of fellowship and solidarity; so, we gravitate toward the strong man or group. This syndrome is what Jeremiah was renouncing.

The Decisive Choice

At the same time, Scripture challenges us 'not be afraid' and 'put no trust in princes, in mere mortals

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powerless to save.' (Psalm 146:3) Stay with that, brothers and sisters: don't put your trust in princes! Instead, we are called to surrender to the Lord "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." (Deuteronomy 6:5)

This is exactly what Jesus is calling us to do if we are going to be His disciples. To believe in Jesus, to accept that He, and not our political allegiances, is ultimate, that He is the last word because He is the Word of God, and that His Spirit is God's Spirit, is what will make Him the center of our existence.

Jeremiah and Jesus are compelling us to make a decisive choice: the option of the Gospel and the Way of Jesus cannot be delayed. Make this call loud and clear. Jesus alludes that His presence will be like fire upon the earth. He says: "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49) These words aim to persuade us to abandon a lukewarm Christianity, marked by apathy, indifference, and close-mindedness to the fire of God's love. That love, as Saint Paul reminds us, "has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5) It is the Holy Spirit that enables us to love God and our neighbor.

It is the Holy Spirit within us that we should trust, not princes.

Let them Know

You see, brothers and sisters, Jesus needs disciples to spread this fire throughout the world and, if we do, we will be recognized as his true disciples. The fire of God's love is what brings people together, heals their wounds, rectifies injustice, and promotes the common good. The fire of the Gospel can overcome divisions that exist between people, socio-economic classes, and nations. Bearing witness to the Gospel overcomes all forms of individualism, extreme nationalism, and particularism. The dynamism of the Holy Spirit and charity is open to all, and we are meant to be conduits of that divine power.

If we are going to follow Jesus as His disciples, we have to be willing to pay the price of living the Gospel - all of it, not just the ones that bolster our private agendas. Being a Christian is a 24/7 endeavor, in which we live our faith in all concrete situations—familial, political, economic, and social—witnessing the Gospel with enthusiasm and zeal, which essentially comes down to love of God and love of neighbor. As the hymn goes, "They will know that we are Christians by our love." Amen.



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