

“If You Can’t Take Anymore, There’s a Reason”

This month I’d like to share with you an article written by Lutheran Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber, which speaks to the challenge of navigating these challenging times. It spoke to my heart this month, and I hope it will speak to you, as well.

“I used to live in a very old apartment building with super sketchy electrical wiring. Were I to audaciously assume my hair drier could run while my stereo was on, I would once again find myself opening the grey metal fuse box next to the refrigerator and flipping the breaker. My apartment had been built at a time when there were no electric hair driers, and the system shut down when modernity asked too much of it.

I think of that fuse box often these days, because friends, I just do not think our psyches were developed to hold, feel and respond to everything coming at them right now; every tragedy, injustice, sorrow and natural disaster happening to every human across the entire planet, in real time every minute of every day. The human heart and spirit were developed to be able to hold, feel and respond to any tragedy, injustice, sorrow or natural disaster that was happening IN OUR VILLAGE.

So my emotional circuit breaker keeps overloading because the hardware was built for an older time.

And yet, when I check social media it feels like there are voices saying “if you aren’t talking about, doing something about, performatively posting about (fill in the blank) then you are an irredeemably callous, privileged, bigot who IS PART OF THE PROBLEM” and when I am someone who does actually care about human suffering and injustice (someone who feels every picture I see, and story I read) it leaves me feeling like absolute [garbage]. I am left with wondering: am I doing enough, sacrificing enough, giving enough, saying enough about all the horrible things right now to think of myself as a good person and subsequently silence the accusing voice in my head? No. The answer is always no. No I am not. Nor could I. Because no matter what I do the goal of “enough” is just as far as when I started.

And yet doing nothing is hardly the answer.

So I wanted to share something with you. Every day of my life I ask myself three discernment questions I learned from one of my teachers, Suzanne Stabile:

What’s MINE to do, and what’s NOT mine to do?

What’s MINE to say and what’s NOT mine to say?

And the third one is harder:

What’s MINE to care about and what’s NOT mine to care about? To be clear—that is not to say that it is not worthy to be cared about by SOMEONE, only that my effectiveness in the world cannot extend to every worthy to be cared about event and situation. It’s not an issue of values, it’s an issue of MATH.*

So I try and remember, 1. We are still living through a global pandemic and that means the baseline of anxiety and grief is higher than ever and shared by everyone. 2. The world is on fire literally and metaphorically. But 3. I only have so much water in my bucket to help with the fires. The more exposure I have to the fires I have NO WATER to fight, the more likely I am to get so burned, and inhale so much smoke that I cannot help anymore with the fires close enough to fight once my bucket is full again.

So I try and tell myself that It's ok to focus on one fire.

It's ok to do what is YOURS to do. Say what's yours to say. Care about what's yours to care about.

That's enough.

If immigration reform is yours to do, if it is the fire you have water to throw on, (thank you! and...) that is enough. There will be voices saying "but what about climate change? You don't care that the planet is dying?". Tune that out. I mean, you could turn around and ask the environmentalist next door why they heartlessly don't care about immigrants, but there is no percentage in that. Instead, we could be so grateful for the people who are called to work on and respond to worthy issues that are not fires we ourselves are equipped to put out.

I'm not saying we should put our heads in the sand, I'm saying that if your circuits are overwhelmed there's a reason and the reason isn't because you are heartless, it's because there is not a human heart on this planet that can bear all of what is happening right now. So thank you for being a person who cares about and responds to animals, or the environment, or immigration, or domestic violence or any of the other worthy-to-be-cared-about [challenges] we are in the midst of right now. Just, thank you."

In peace, Pastor Marissa