

It's possible that if you have spent any time on social media in the last probably ten years or so, you have run across blogger and activist Glennon Doyle. Her career started as a mommy blogger who eventually became open and honest about her struggles with addiction and eating disorders, using her own journey to wholeness as a way of reaching out and connecting with others. If you haven't run into Glennon through her own work, you may have seen her expounding the confusion of soccer rules alongside her wife, former World Cup champion Abby Wambach. Together they have launched a podcast and a social media presence all with the aim of encouraging women, speaking out and up for justice and equal rights, and generally just trying their ardent best to put as much love into the world as they can.

Over the course of her career and through multiple books, Glennon has coined multiple words and phrases to describe her mentality about getting through life. The one that has stuck out the most for me, to the point that I have it on a bracelet and on a sign on my desk is, "We can do hard things." Having lived a life fighting through drug addiction, dark nights of the soul, divorce, and discovery, Glennon is no stranger to the reality of hard things, devastating things, things which could potentially crush one's soul. Yet, she has approached them with this fiery mentality—the hard things are never not going to exist, they will always be there, however, we can tackle

them, we can face them, at the end of the day, we can do hard things, especially when we do them within community, centered in faith, and looking towards the future and what those hard things will bring to us.

Glennon's mindset tries to hold to the reality that difficulty is going to come, it is inevitable, and there is no use running from or railing against it, however, how we handle that difficulty is going to determine how we come through it. Will we let the hard things break us or will we tell ourselves we can do the hard things of life and come out the other side stronger, braver, more sure of ourselves, and more aware of the world around us. This phrase, this mantra has been the only thing circling through my head as I have contemplated the lessons this week, uncertain of where the word was leading or what I wanted to say. All I kept going back to was this simple honest truth, we can do hard things...yet just because we can do them doesn't mean that the act of actually doing them isn't, well, hard, a reality that Jeremiah and Jesus both knew intimately.

Let's start with Jeremiah, whom we find fairly early on in his prophetic call in our first lesson this morning. I joked with the Bible study folks that the heading for this section in my Bible was "Jeremiah complains *again* and is reassured," like ok apparently complaining is Jeremiah's thing. Yet, I feel like that characterization isn't quite fair to what Jeremiah is

experiencing. Yes, Jeremiah is complaining, but he's complaining because he feels like God has sold him a handful of magic beans and then abandoned him. This isn't just complaining because life is hard, this is complaining because Jeremiah feels he's been lied to.

Jeremiah lays out to God that he embraced his call as prophet willingly. He consumed God's word within himself and they filled him with joy, he has dedicated his entire life to sharing that word, calling to God's people, he has spurned just going out, eating, drinking, and being merry, unable to see the world through rose-colored glasses, but only through the eyes of God's bent towards justice, and so he finds himself constantly indignant at the frustration of the world. If that wasn't enough, he is bearing the brunt of persecutors and those who visit angst and frustration upon him. People don't want to hear what he has to say and rather than just ignore him, they lambast him with hate. It's become too much, and Jeremiah calls God out, like where are you and where was this in the job description? God's word is no longer a joy to Jeremiah, but a burden, one he feels he is bearing alone, and he isn't sure he can do it anymore. He feels God's waters which once ran through his heart have run dry and failed him.

So there's Jeremiah sitting in the reality of the hard things facing him. Let's leave him there for a hot second and jump to Jesus. Jesus is just

coming off of an incredible moment. At least one of his disciples gets it! Peter has confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, and so Jesus knows that now is the time to let them all in on just what exactly that means, because it is very different from what they have been raised to believe about who the Messiah will be. He tells them the path which lays before him, his arrest, the cross, ultimately his death and resurrection. It's hard news to share, an even harder reality to face, especially for Jesus but he needs them to know so that they can walk this road with him openly and honestly, and yet...this revelation does not go to plan.

Here comes Peter...he tugs Jesus aside and *yells* at him, rebukes him. This can't happen! That is *not* what I meant when I said you were the Messiah so get all this death talk out of here, because nope, no way, this isn't happening. We think it's harsh, Jesus' plea for Peter, *Satan*, to get behind him, but Jesus isn't saying Peter is some guy in red robes with a pitchfork standing in front of him. Jesus is saying, you, the one who would tempt me, the one who would call me from who I am meant to be, please don't put before me the possibility, the option to *not* do the hard thing, because I have to do it, and if you tempt me with another option...well, please just don't tempt me with any other option than the hard one.

Where Jeremiah and Jesus' stories meet is in the reality that both of them are given assurance, but neither of them are given an out from the hard thing. For Jeremiah, God's words come to him with promises of God's unrelenting, unfailing presence and the promise that God will help Jeremiah gird his strength against those who try to prevail over him. God says that Jeremiah will be delivered, redeemed, but God doesn't say that people will stop raging against him, that he will stop feeling indignation in his heart, that his call to speak God's word will get any easier, he just won't do it alone.

For Jesus, the assurance is a little less obvious, but it comes in his own assurance of who he is and what he is called to do and thus what he calls the rest of the disciples to do. Jesus tells them that he knows and trusts that the cross is the only way forward, the cross is what will lead to grace and love for not only them, but for all of humanity. Jesus must do the hard thing in order for good to prevail, and ultimately the disciples will be called to the same future, bearing their crosses, doing the hard thing for the sake of those whom Jesus will hand over to them to shepherd.

To us...it sounds a little bit like cold comfort, like backhanded reassurance, but it is the reality of what both Jeremiah and Jesus receive, and honestly it is the same kind of comfort that we often receive even if it is not at all what we want to hear. We so desperately want our call as people of

faith to be one of ease, to feel that since we are claimed, named, and called by God, washed anew in the waters of baptism that that sets us up for a life on the easy path, that no difficulty will come or when it does we can simply pray it away, say God will handle it, but we all know that is fantasy, something that we try to cling to in order to avoid reality. At no point does God ever promise that life, even life with God, life with faith will be easy, but God gives us the same assurance that is given to Jeremiah and Jesus.

Just as God assured Jeremiah, so God assures us, whatever hard things we are called to do in life and with our faith, we do not do it alone. God girds our loins and steels our hearts for the road ahead, promising that what we feel called to share, while it may be hard, will be worth it. Sharing God's love with the world, speaking out for justice, it's never going to be easy, especially in a world that is enamored by hate and that likes to walk hand in hand with injustice, but it is necessary. The hard thing is what will lead to hope, because if we are willing to put love into the world and fight for our siblings when the world assails them, we will come out on the other side bold, brave, and hopefully having made the world a better place. We can do hard things, with God by our side.

Just as God assured Jesus, so God assures us, whatever hard things we are called to do in life and with our faith, we do it knowing that we are

called children of God and that sometimes we do the hard thing for the sake of others so that they may live, that they may know grace and love. No, the crosses that we bear when we speak out against gun violence or anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation are not easy, they are beyond hard and they can bring vitriol and spite our way, but we do those hard things in order to make the crosses others bear lighter. Jesus did the hard thing so that the hard things his disciples had to do might be a little easier, that they may do them with the assurance that it isn't in vain. We do the same thing, we do the hard things so our siblings might have an easier time, a safer life, one that is filled with love not hate, acceptance not judgment. We do the hard things so that others don't have to do the hardest things.

And just because we know we have to do the hard things doesn't mean we can't let God know we're scared, both Jesus and Jeremiah did exactly that. We can vent, complain, point at the temptation and call it Satan. We can say all the things that are on our hearts about what lies before us and name the difficulty for what it is. We can say God, I hear you but I'm scared. Yet, we do those things knowing that ultimately the answer from God won't be, ok well then you don't have to do it, ignore the hard, but rather, I hear you, I am with you, I will walk with you and help you carry this, because you my beloved child, can do hard things. **AMEN!!!**