

Sermon Text for June 18, 2017

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II Samuel 11:1-5, 14-15, 26-27, Romans 6:12-14, 20-23

“What is your passion?”

Happy Father’s Day to all of you men out there. All men are father’s in one way or another, we have all mentored and taught and been points of influence in the lives of boys and girls whether we are biological fathers or not. I can’t help but think of my dad on this day, do you do the same? He was a passionate man in all that he did so my memories of him, he passed away in 2005, are all vivid and intense.

I remember him holding my hand in the fog in Portugal and I felt secure and safe even though I couldn’t see him. I remember the countless hours we spent together competing against each other on the basketball and tennis courts and on the golf course. I don’t ever remember practicing with him, just competing against him, just trying to beat him. I remember him introducing me to people who were influential in religious and social justice circles. He wasn’t perfect, but I have yet to meet someone who understood the kingdom of God and what was important in the kingdom of God. I knew what he loved to do and I knew his passions and I knew that I was one of them. Can you ask anything else from a father?

So what is your passion? Forty years from now when your kids stand in front of 200 people and recount their father, what will they say about you? How do you want people that you have mentored to remember you? We had a bit of an unfortunate first Scripture for Father’s Day, but we can see it as an example of misdirected passion and where that can take us. Today, Paul in Romans gives us a road map to follow so Jesus can be our passion and the resulting effects that will have on our life.

READ SCRIPTURE

Martin Luther, the theologian who began the Reformation, which by the way in October celebrates its 500 year anniversary, hard to believe, it just seems like yesterday, he was once asked if you knew that the world would come to an end tomorrow, what would you do today? If the world were to end tomorrow, I would plant an apple tree today. Even as we face the world in which we live today and even if we have little hope for tomorrow, our actions now, today in the present have to reflect a hope that we have which is securely anchored in Jesus Christ. What we do today reflects what is important to us, what is our passion regardless of what tomorrow may hold.

What we pursue as our passion will dictate not only our present but also our future. Turn to Romans and you will see Paul sets up a very clear dichotomy between a pursuit of or a passion for sin vs. righteousness. Nobody here is going to admit to pursuing after sin. If asked we would all say that as even though we are not perfect, we still pursue righteousness and sometimes we make mistakes. Nobody would say that they pursue sin as their passion. But what I want us to realize today is that there is no third neutral reality where we can choose to be free from sin and free from God.

This entire Scripture has Paul making it clear that we will be a slave to someone. We will have a master and there are two choices as to who will be our master. We will either be a slave to sin or a slave to Jesus. There is no lukewarm option, we are either hot or cold. We cannot be dispassionate and have no allegiance. We live in an era where people are known as nones. Who are the nones? They are people who when they are asked what is their religious affiliation they will more often than not put down "none". People today feel that they just want to walk the middle of the road and not be committed to anything. I don't want to be committed to the church but that doesn't mean that I'm committed to sin. There is a tendency to think that we can go through life just not committed to anything. The nones are making their mark.

Now, let me be clear. I am not in any way saying that church membership denotes the level of your commitment to Christ. We know that people who are members may be so in name alone and I'm sure that there are some Presbyterians who are pursuing lives that is polar opposite to what the kingdom of God ought to look like, you know the whole loving God and your neighbor thing. But it is equally clear that there is no such thing as a none. When you are a none, you have made a choice. None is not a choice when asked if you will choose Jesus or if you will choose sin. If we do not choose Jesus then we choose sin. If our passion is not Jesus then it will be that which takes us away from a relationship with Jesus.

Do you hear that in Paul's words in the Scripture that we read this morning? Look at vs. 20 where he speaks in the past of when we were slaves to sin. He follows it up in vs. 22 and says, God, draw down memory lane and remember what it was like when you pursued sin. Do that for a moment now. Think of a time in your life when you know that you were pursuing sin. What was your Bathsheeba moment, even if it didn't involve infidelity, what was your time of pursuing sin. How did that work out for you? Aren't you ashamed of it now? You probably wouldn't want me to know about it, right? When sin is your passion it leads to a life of sin which then leads to death.

Look at our first reading for today. We know the story. King David, keep in mind, was someone after the Lord's heart. His writings in the Psalms have moved many. He is considered a giant of the faith. We read about him in Sunday School, maybe not this story, but the good stories about David when he killed Goliath and played the harp for Saul. But his passions which were not of the Lord, got the best of him. It all started when he decided to stay home instead of go out to battle with his friends. As king he could have had anyone that he wanted, as the prophet Nathan told him, but instead he chose a married woman to pursue his passion. He had her husband after he sinned, then deliver his own death sentence to his commanding officer, and so he forced Bathsheeba to become a part of his harem. Boy, it sounds almost too real to be true in today's time. One decision based on sin leads to a spiraling of decisions and events until you find yourself in the untenable position of having to pursue sin as your passion.

All of us have the freedom, it is one of the few freedoms that we actually have, to pursue our passion. Something will be our passion. Something will guide our decision making. If it is not Jesus as Savior, then it is sin. Those are the only two choices. Paul tells us the decision to follow sin leads to death. Sin can only rule when we obey it. Sin denotes not just a physical appetite but our dependency for the satisfaction of our physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and even our religious needs.

You see each act of moral choice involves an act of moral commitment. Depravity involves such a focus of vitality on this mortal body that when death has its say all of this life would have been spent in satisfying this body so that nothing is left, only death.

But the Gospel, when our passion is Jesus Christ, it offers eternal life. When we focus on Jesus in our lives then we naturally go through the process of sanctification. As we focus on Jesus we are made holy. That is what sanctification means, the process of becoming holy. That ought to be our focus, our passion as Paul states in vs.22. And then, when death comes, there is more because we have stored up our treasures in heaven, we have focused on kingdom work and eternal life awaits.

Folks, we can choose how we want to live. Sometimes, like if today you chose to live for Jesus and free yourself from the shackles of sin, it can be hard. If we choose Jesus it can be hard. When a prisoner is freed after many years in prison, the statistics are staggering, it is hard. After 5 years 77 percent of people released from prison end up being arrested again. It isn't easy being a disciple of Jesus Christ when the world and what we know draws us the other way. Freedom in Christ is true freedom, but it aint easy.

You know, think about the media and what grabs the most attention. Not acts of righteousness, but acts of evil. It seems that for every good act, there are thousands of bad acts, at least that is what the ratio seems like from the news and from what we hear around us. So that means it will take thousands of acts of righteousness by people who have a passion for Jesus Christ to offset that balance. So with all the bad you have heard happening around us lately, have you heard about a tree that was planted to give life and hope even in the midst of death and despair? Have you heard about the christening of a bike rack in order to celebrate our community? You already know about how the hungry come to this church and leave fed. You have seen the children loved here at this church, did you know that the widows are comforted, you have been a part of lifting Jesus high in worship. Yes, you have seen all of this and you have seen people make the choice to be a part of this. You have seen people, you have been the people who have chosen Jesus over sin. You have made the kingdom of God your passion.

Now don't get me wrong, sanctification and making Jesus your passion isn't about coming to church, or not drinking alcohol, or staying clean from this opioid epidemic, or not swearing, it is not about volunteering for VBS or even living a normal life. We don't choose to live our lives with the intent of not sinning. We don't make decisions wondering if we are sinning or not. We make decisions based upon whether we are giving God enough glory or not. We don't live out of fear, we don't pursue our passion with a look over our shoulder wondering if we are sinning. We just live knowing that we are pursuing the kingdom of God. It really isn't that complicated, that's why Romans is faith for dummies, because we don't need to complicate things with our theology.

So what does sanctification look like? What does the process of becoming holy look like? Let me use the words of Micah 6:8: do justice, love kindness, walk humbly. All of these things are focused away from us and towards other people. Our passion for Jesus has to drive us away from ourselves and towards others.

So men, when you look back on your life ask what will people say was your passion? I pray that the answer will come back: he pursued justice and opened his arms to everyone, he loved kindness and expressed to others. He walked humbly with the Lord. Let that be your passion. Amen.