

August 29, 2021
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost / Proper 17

Meditation: What's your passion?

Wow. I just didn't know which piece of scripture to focus on this week. Maybe because I see so many connections between them. But we rarely see anything from the Song of Songs or the Song of Solomon come up in the lectionary, and anytime we can read from the book of love poetry I'm reluctant to let the opportunity pass by, especially when it's on your wedding anniversary.

I was talking with someone recently. They said they felt like they were in the doldrums. Nothing seemed to interest them, or matter to them, and they just didn't know what to do. I suppose it's not really surprising given the last eighteen months we've had. It's perfectly understandable that people would be feeling a little depressed or anxious or Their concern was that they didn't know what to do about it.

What to do about it. One of the lessons we didn't read this morning was from the book of James, an epistle, a letter, actually. In it, the author implores us not to simply be hearers of the word of God, but to be doers. Hearing and then not doing means the word is of no import to us, or we are just too depressed to care. But doing, now that would mean that the word mattered to us. Doing implies a concern for the word. Doing means we care about what we've heard. Doing is a sign that we are passionate about something. Passion. There you go, right back to the love poetry of the Song of Songs. The male seeks out the female and invites her to do something, to come away with him.

In the gospel lesson, the Pharisees asked Jesus why his disciples are eating with unclean hands, thus defiling the body. They are not talking about hands that are dirty. They are not concerned about what germs the disciples might be ingesting. They are concerned with ritual purity. The body is seen as a temple and the food is an offering, and therefore must be offered with hands that are ritually pure – clean hands. Jesus' response is that it is not what goes into the body that defiles, but what comes out that defiles, because what comes out is coming from the heart, from the seat of passion. And then he offers a list of things that defile, including fornication, theft, murder, and adultery. I'm sure you could all add others, like bearing false witness. The corollary of what Jesus is saying is that what comes from the heart could also be good – love, care, healing, compassion, mercy, justice, and so on. Either way, it is what is in the heart, what we are passionate about that comes out.

When James implores us to be doers of the word, he is inviting us to be passionate about the things that God is passionate about. He says, "religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in distress." In other words, James implores us to be passionate about God's sense of justice, compassion, mercy, and love.

It's the passion within that has been on display this summer. We've seen the passion of the athletes at the Olympic and Paralympic games. It is passion that we saw in Aurelie Rivard this weekend when she not only swam to a gold medal, but also to a world record. It was passion that we saw when wheelchair athlete Brent Lakatos raced to silver in the 400 m race. It is passion that

we see in the faces of the Taliban, and of those seeking to flee the Taliban in Afghanistan. It is passion that we see in the protests against certain political figures, against mask mandates, against vaccine passports, against old growth logging, or even in your minister as he walks to raise funds to support those who are in need of both affordable housing and support with mental health and/or addiction issues.

The person I mentioned at the beginning – they have rediscovered their passion. They are now doing the things that they are passionate about, and life is sweet once again.

I think that it is passion that lies at the heart of all three of the readings today. Passion is what spurs us to action, whether it is to marry someone we are passionate about, or show up at a rally to protest an injustice. Passion can lead us to do good, or to do evil. The question I have for you is what's your passion?