

REIGNITING YOUR PASSION FOR GOD

Text: Mark 11:30

First Sunday After Epiphany

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Redeemer Lutheran Church

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The creative force behind all great art, drama, music, architecture, and writing is passion. Nothing great is ever accomplished in life without passion. Nothing great is ever sustained in life without passion. Passion is what energizes life. Passion is what makes the impossible possible. Passion is what gives you a reason to get up in the morning. Passion is what causes explorers to boldly go where no one's gone before. Passion is what causes scientists to spend years trying to find the cure to a dreaded disease. Passion is what takes a good athlete and turns them into a great athlete. You've got to have passion in your life. Passion is what makes you say, "I'm going to do something with my life."

Without passion life becomes boring. Without passion life becomes monotonous. Without passion life becomes routine. Without passion life becomes dull. God created you with the emotions to have passion in your life. He wants you to live a passionate life.

One day a man walked up to Jesus and asked, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus said, ".....you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

Nothing matters more than that. That's the number one thing in life. God wants you to love Him passionately. Nothing else matters in life if you don't love God passionately. God doesn't want you to love Him half-heartedly. He wants you to love Him with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

I love the paraphrase of that verse from The Message. **"Jesus said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.'"**

Note the word "passion". Put your heart in it. Put some muscle into it. Put some energy into it. Put some emotion into your relationship with Me. Don't be a wimp about it. When it comes to me don't be a namby-pamby. Don't be half-hearted. Give it all you've got. Jesus is saying, "If you're going to follow Me, you've got to do it with passion. You've got to give it some oomph, some spark, some zip, some enthusiasm, some zest. I want you to live passionately for Me."

This truth is all through the Bible. We're to seek God passionately. We're to love God passionately. We're to serve and obey God passionately. We're to trust God passionately.

St. Paul in Colossians 3:23 says "Whatever you do, do it with all of your heart as unto the Lord & not unto men. When it comes to our relationship with God there's no holding back.

In America it's ok to be passionate about anything except God. Being passionate about God is not politically correct. You can be passionate about movies. You can be passionate about sports. You can be passionate about politics. You can be passionate about fashions and clothes. You can be passionate about restaurants. But you cannot be passionate about God. That's a no-no.

If you type in the phrase "a passion for..." into Amazon.com you will find a couple hundred books with that title. There's a book called a Passion for Birds. There's a book called a Passion for Books. There's a Passion for Cactus and a Passion for Chocolate. There's a Passion for Fashion ... for Fishing... for Flying ... for Gardening ... for Golf and for Hunting. There's even a book called a Passion for Mushrooms. There's a Passion for Needlepoint, Pasta, and Ponies. There are books called, a Passion for Potatoes, for Roses and for Shoes. There's even a book called a Passion for Steam.

In our culture it's ok to be passionate about anything except your religion, except your faith, except your relationship with God. You can go to a rock concert, or a political rally or a baseball game and you can shout your head off. You can get excited. You can get hoarse from yelling so loud. When your team loses you can cry. Nobody thinks that's a big deal. When your team wins you can jump up & dance around and wave your hands in the air. If you do that at a game people say, "He's a real fan!" If we do that in church people say, "He's a fanatic! He's a nut case." You don't want to get too emotional about your faith. Anything else but not that.

But that's not what Romans 12:1 says. Romans 12:1 says, " **Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor.**" Note the word "keep." It's not automatic. It's a choice. It's a discipline. It's something you must maintain. We are not by nature passionate about God. It's something that we must choose to do. We easily get distracted. Everything in life seems to conspire to keep us from being passionate about God. We need to keep our passion going. It requires effort. It takes discipline. It takes work. It's not just automatic.

When you first become a believer and you really understand what a good deal you've got you get excited about it. You think, "This is great! All my sins are forgiven. I now have a purpose for living. I now have a future home in heaven. What a deal! When you first give your life to Christ you're pretty passionate. But as time goes by you begin to lose your steam. You begin to lose your zip, your zest, your enthusiasm.

Why does that happen? Do you know what the worst sin is for Christians? It's not adultery. It's not murder. It's not some sort of sexual perversion. God tells us in Revelation 3. He says its being luke warm. It's having no passion. It's when you begin to say: "God is just one of the things in my life. I have my social life and my career life and my family life and over here is a little piece of the pie called church." You think "He's a part of my life but nothing more than that. God says, "How dare you! I love you completely, totally and without reservation. I love you unconditionally. I love you passionately. I made you, created you, planned you, purposed you, and saved you. I have a place for you in heaven, and you would treat that with half-hearted indifference saying, 'Excuse me but there's a good TV show on tonight?'"

Jesus says "I'd rather have you hot or cold. Being luke warm is not acceptable."

C. S. Lewis said, "The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important." If Jesus is God and out of love died for you, you owe Him the rest of your life. Every spare minute of it. If He didn't then go home and live a self-centered life. The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important. It either deserves your entire life or it deserves nothing at all.

So how great is your passion for God? Are you lukewarm? Are you just going through the motions? Or are you red hot for God because He loves you that much? Has there ever been a

time in your life when you were closer to God than you are right now? If so why? Nobody's holding you back. The truth is you're as close to God as you choose to be. You can have as much of God as u want. You can be as passionate about God as you want. If you're not it's your fault.

Over the next two weeks we're going to look at seven passion killers. I want you to use them as a checklist. Ask yourself: what keeps me from having a constant passion for God?

1. An unbalanced schedule. If you're overworked or you are under worked you're going to lose your passion for life. You will lose your passion for God. Life is a series of seasons. That's in the Bible. There's a season for everything. There's a rhythm to life. You need both input and output. You need both rest and work. Too much of either will cause you to lose your passion.

You can go to either extreme. **Psalm 127 says, "It's senseless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, fearing that you're going to starve to death; for God wants His loved ones to get their proper rest."**

For some of you the problem is you're always giving out. You're always helping. You're always sharing. You're always serving. You're always working. You're always being generous. And you never take time to recharge. If you never take time to recharge you've gotten unbalanced on the ministry side, on the work side and you're going to eventually get compassion fatigue.

You will reach the point where you will just stop caring. You won't care about God any more. You won't care about other people any more. You won't care about anything anymore. **Why?** Because you're burning out from too much work, from too much service. When you care and care and care, without a proper break, you will eventually get compassion fatigue.

Others of you are the exact opposite. You're always taking in but never giving out. You go to Bible studies. You listen to teachers on the radio. You listen to CD's. You go to seminars. You go to Christian concerts. You go to workshops. You come to church all the time. You're always learning. You're always taking in. But you're not giving out anything. You don't have any ministry. You don't have any mission. You're not really helping anybody. You're taking in all the time and you're never giving out.

Receiving without giving is also dangerous. **The Bible says in James 4:17 "So whoever**

knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." The more you know about God's plan for your life the more responsible you are to God for that knowledge. The more you know, if you don't do anything about it, you are simply increasing your judgment. You're increasing your responsibility. Because God holds you accountable for what you know.

So we need both input and output in our lives. We need balance. Balance.

You need to have time to worship with God- privately and corporately.

You need to have times when you're fellowshiping with other believers.

You need to have times when you're reading God's word and growing as a Christian.

You need to have times of ministry -- service -- where you're giving out and using your abilities.

You need times of mission where you're sharing your faith with others.

If you neglect any of these areas you are going to get imbalanced. And you will inevitably lose your passion. You're going to end up asking yourself, "How come I don't feel as close to God as I used to?" The answer is because you're out of balance.

2. An unused talent. An unused talent will cause you to lose your passion for life and your passion for God. **1 Peter 4:10 says "Each of you has been blessed with one of God's many wonderful gifts to be used in the service of others. So use your gifts well."** God gives you certain talents, abilities, personality and gifts. Those gifts and talents that you've been given are not for your benefit. They're for the benefit of others. My gifts are for your benefit. Your gifts are for my benefit. You are to use those gifts in the service of others. God has given you a special role in this world. He wants you to make a contribution with your life. If you don't use your talents you're going to lose your passion. God did not give you special abilities just to sit on them and do nothing about it. God says I want you to use it or you're going to lose it.

Here's a true saying: "Where the needs of the world & your talents cross, there lies your calling."

Everyone has talent. What is rare is the courage to follow that talent wherever it leads. Use what talents you possess. The woods would be silent if no birds sang except those that sang best.

3. An unconfessed sin. Few things rob us of our joy, confidence and passion, more quickly than guilt. Here's how it works with us with guilt, the sin in our lives. We don't walk around

thinking, "I have a sin in my life. I am a guilty person." No, we consciously rationalize it. Consciously we think, "its ok. Everybody's doing it. It's no big deal." But subconsciously it gnaws at us. Subconsciously it pops into our mind.

We cannot feel enthusiasm and guilt at the same time. You can't feel guilt and passion at the same time because guilt by its very definition robs you of passion.

Psalm 38:4&6 says, "My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear... I am bowed down and I am brought low."

We have all had our computers crash. They stop working. Some program tries to write the wrong thing to the wrong place and it's gone! Guilt does that to us. We're not made to live with guilt. God did not make you to carry guilt around in your life. He made us to deal with it immediately. He sent Jesus to this earth to die on a cross. Through faith in that cross God offers us a gift. That gift is freedom from guilt. That is God's gift.

Some of you right now are in the midst of a personal system crash. The joy in your life has crashed and you're trying to keep the enthusiasm up. You're trying to keep the passion alive. But the guilt keeps crashing your system. Thankfully there is something that can be done about it. Jesus has already done all that's needed to be done to deal with our guilt. He has taken it upon Himself. He has paid for it in our place. That's why He came to this earth.

1 John 1:9 says "If we confess our sins God can be trusted to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That's His promise. To confess just means you agree with God. You just say, "God, I agree with you. There is sin in my life. I have done that which is wrong. I agree with you. And I want to begin to live the kind of way you want me to live. Would you free me- for the sake of the bitter sufferings & death of Jesus- from this guilt?"

I would encourage you to do it now! Don't wait. Sometimes we carry guilt around for days, weeks, months. Even years. You shouldn't carry guilt around even an hour. Do not carry it. So right now in your mind, in your heart, take it to God. Say, "I confess it. God, relieve me of this guilt. Thank You for forgiving me. Please restore my passion?" If you ask He will.

True confession is not the mere mental assent that we have done wrong. Confession means

seeing and agreeing with God about how our sins have harmed us and others. It is pouring out our shame and deep sorrow to the Lord over our misdeeds. It is repenting of our evil ways. It is turning around and doing what's right & good. It's seeking reconciliation with others & our God.

This is the repentance that leads to life. **The Bible says, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation & leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."** 1Cor. 7:10

I don't know why we carry our sin along with us. I do it too. Instead of quickly running to Jesus. Instead of running to the cross where we find forgiveness, sometimes we carry our sin around. We feel badly about it, but because of shame we don't take it to Jesus right away. We are ashamed to admit that, yes, we did it again. You know what that's like right?

It's like getting all dressed up for an important party. Then as you walk out the door you see a big mud pile, and for whatever reason end up falling into it. But then instead of running back inside and getting cleaned up, you just sit there feeling bad. Feeling sorry for yourself. Feeling too ashamed. But while we sit there, we are missing the party. The party is going on without us! We must hurry back and get cleaned off. We must come quickly to the cross when we have sinned, and confess it and ask for forgiveness. Our Lord promised through John that **"If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just & will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."** (1 Jn 1:9).

Martin Luther put it this way in the first of the 95 theses he nailed to the door of the Wittenberg church: **"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'repent,' He willed that the entire life of a believer be one of repentance."**