

A Passionate Life

13th Weekend in Kingdomtide – August 13/14, 2005

Sermon Background Study

Luke 24:30-35 (NRSV)

³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Acts 18:24-28 (NRSV)

²⁴Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. ²⁵He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately. ²⁷And when he wished to cross over to Achaia [the Greek peninsula], the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. On his arrival he greatly helped those who through grace had become believers, ²⁸for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus.

Today marks the beginning of an exciting new initiative at St. Andrew as we seek to become not only passionate disciples, but a passionate church.

Some books really stick in my memory. One is Leo Buscaglia’s *Bus 9 to Paradise*, written nearly twenty years ago. In the book, readers are taken on a mythical bus ride toward paradise on earth, looking for ways to embrace the simple joys of life. What struck me most was Buscaglia’s observation that the most joyful people have passions in their lives, activities or interests that make them excited to get up in the morning. On Bus 9 it mattered less what the passion was, as simply being passionate about something – leading a passion-filled life. Buscaglia was right so far as he went, but I’ve come to learn that the object of our passion matters too. To the point, all of us are created in the image of God so that we might become passionately devoted to God and to one another . . . so that we might become passionate disciples of Jesus Christ.

Today, we begin a six-week journey toward such passion, toward a much better understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and, most importantly, toward a life centered upon our relationships with God and one another. After all, who doesn’t want a life filled with enthusiasm, passion, and joy. In today’s Scripture passages, we meet several people who must have been surprised by the passion they found welling up in their own hearts.

“Were not our hearts burning within us . . .”

On a Sunday afternoon, two disciples were on the road to Emmaus, a town some distance from Jerusalem. They were followers of Jesus from Nazareth and had been in Jerusalem for the tumultuous last week of Jesus’ life. They talked busily about all that happened in the past few days. They were puzzled and confused about how it all had ended on Friday. But then again, some women had made the most amazing claim that morning – that Jesus was alive! Soon, they were joined by a third man as they

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by Rev. Mike Breen & Rev. Walt Kallestad

Do you have passion in your life? Are you passionate about your faith? Are you a passionate disciple of Jesus? We know that passion is key to a fulfilled, happy, and productive life. But passion seems to elude so many of us. Did you ever see another Christian and say to yourself, “I want some of that!” In this sermon series, we will explore how to regain the passion in our lives and learn some simple easy-to-learn tools to help us in this.

This is the book that underlies the upcoming sermon and teaching series. It is an easy read, but still filled with many helpful, easy-to-remember, and challenging teachings. It lays out all eight of the LifeShapes that we’ll be hearing about in the coming months. We hope that you will pick up a copy and read it before or during the sermon series.

Copies of the book are being sold in the Narthex and in the bookstore during this sermon series.

walked along. The man walked with them and talked with them, explaining why the Messiah had to suffer. When they sat down to the evening meal, the man took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. When they ate, their eyes were opened and they knew that the man was Jesus. Later, after Jesus had left them, they realized that their hearts had been burning inside them as they talked with this unknown man. *Burning inside them . . .*

When we talk about the people of history, whether it is Julius Caesar or George Washington, we are talking about a dead person. But when we talk about Jesus, we are talking about someone who lives, who is still involved in the world and in our lives. We may not be able to sit down with Jesus at the dinner table like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, but we can have a relationship with Jesus that burns in our own hearts as well.

"He spoke with burning enthusiasm . . ."

Apollos is one the lesser known figures in the New Testament. He was a Jewish Christian, both educated and eloquent, from Alexandria, Egypt, the second largest city in the Roman Empire. We first meet Apollos in Ephesus, a very large city on the western coast of modern-day Turkey. He has come there to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. He does so knowledgeably and with a "burning enthusiasm." It seems though that Apollos has some things to learn (who doesn't!). He not been taught well about the Christian practice of baptism, for he knows only about the baptism practiced by John the Baptist. However, being a devoted and passionate disciple, Apollos is eager to learn. In Ephesus, a husband-wife team, Aquila and Priscilla, take Apollos aside and teach him more about the Christian faith. Better

LifeShapes

Jesus spoke more about the kingdom of God than about anything else. He wanted his disciples then and now to grasp that God's kingdom is a present reality, not only a future hope. Jesus taught his disciples a great deal about what it means to live within God's kingdom today, on earth as it is in heaven.

Mike Breen and Walt Kallestad's *A Passionate Life* offers us eight different shapes that connect Jesus' teachings about kingdom living with our day-to-day lives. These LifeShapes offer us easy-to-remember ways to visualize and internalize Jesus' teachings.

For example, the second of the eight shapes is a semi-circle that we can think of as a pendulum. It represents Jesus' teachings about Sabbath and the rhythm of life between work and rest. Jesus worked very hard, but he repeatedly took the time to withdraw from the crowds for prayer and solitude. For too many of us, it seems almost impossible to imagine that we could plan times of rest – real rest, not the "working vacation" that you need a vacation to recover from!

Here's another example. The sixth shape is a hexagon (the one with six sides, for those of us who are geometrically challenged). The six sides draw us into contemplation about the Lord's prayer and our own prayer life. Again, the LifeShape is a simple and powerful tool to help us focus, remember, and practice prayer.

In the next four weeks, we'll concentrate on two shapes. We'll look at the triangle, which represents the key relationships in our lives: *up* (God), *in* (within the body of Christ), and *out* (with the world). Then, we'll move on to the circle of learning, as we consider how it is that we truly go about learning what it means to live the life of a disciple, to live as God intends for us to live.

equipped for his ministry, Apollos left Ephesus and headed for Corinth, where he would continue to play a prominent role in the young church. So far as we know, Apollos' passion never subsided. More than fifteen years after Apollos first appeared in Ephesus, Paul urges Titus to see that Apollos lacks nothing in his work of proclaiming the gospel (Titus 3:13).

Finding the passion

Reading stories from the NT of disciples with burning hearts is one thing but, for many of us, "burning hearts" would rarely describe our lives as Christians. Perhaps we feel the burn once in awhile, but too many Christians don't find much to be truly passionate about in their life, much less in their faith.

Over the coming weeks, we'll consider an approach to discipleship that can rekindle in all of us a deeper commitment to Christ, to one another, and to the Christian life. There are no tricks here, no simple 1-2-3 steps, no new programs. Rather, we'll be talking about the same discipleship Christians have talked about and endeavored to live out for 2,000 years, but we'll be talking in new ways. We'll be using some new vocabulary and some easy-to-remember shapes but the stories we will tell and the advice we will give to one another are not new. The path of genuine, passionate, discipleship may not always be easy, but it has been well trod.

And from our passionate lives as disciples of Jesus Christ will emerge a passionate church, a passionate St. Andrew, ever more equipped and ready to be the light to the world, to throw head, heart, and hands into the joyful work of helping others to live within God's kingdom and to enjoy a passion they never imagined. Such is the power of burning hearts.

Daily Bible Readings

(some more stories of lesser-known disciples in the NT)

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 Acts 10 The Holy Spirit converts Cornelius, a Roman Centurion. Peter is present. This is a pivotal moment, as Cornelius is the first outright Gentile convert.</p>	<p>Day 2 Acts 18:1-11 Some disciples in Corinth, including Aquila and Priscilla.</p>
<p>Day 3 Philippians 2:19-30 Timothy and Epaphroditus</p>	<p>Day 4 Philemon Paul pleads that Philemon would receive Onesimus, a slave, in love as he would Paul.</p>
<p>Day 5 Romans 16 & 1 Corinthians 16:15-19 It is easy to skip over Paul's greetings in his letters, but take the time to read these lists and hear Paul's comments about so many passionate disciples.</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

Sermon Notes

August Book Recommendation

A Passionate Life, by Mike Breen and Walt Kallestad

Do you have passion in your life? Are you passionate about your faith? Are you a passionate disciple of Jesus? We know that passion is key to a fulfilled, happy, and productive life. But passion seems to elude so many of us. Did you ever see another Christian and say to yourself, "I want some of that!" This is the book that underlies the current sermon and teaching series. It is an easy read, but still filled with many helpful, easy-to-remember, and challenging teachings. We hope that you will pick up a copy in the bookstore and read it during the coming weeks.

Fall Bible Academy course schedule and registration is now on-line at www.standrewccl.org. We've got a great line-up. Check it out!

This fall, the St. Andrew Bible Academy will be offering a large variety of classes at convenient times. Regardless of your personal Bible background there is a place for you in the Academy. The courses are designed to challenge those who are just beginning to explore the Bible and the Christian faith, as well as those who have been faithful students for many years. Classes begin the week of Sept. 12.

Classes include *Introducing the Bible: The Drama of Scripture*; *God Is Closer Than You Think*; *David: A Man After God's Own Heart*; *Genesis: The Beginning*; *Is That You, God?*; *Know Why You Believe*; *Why We Are Methodists*; and *Learning from Those Who Have Gone Before Us: A History Lesson on the Christian Church*.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

The place to begin this week is simply talking about the passions in your life. Maybe you are passionate about golf or cooking or tennis or . . . What gives rise to the passions in our lives? How do our passions and enthusiasms enrich our lives? How much time and attention do we pay to such interests of ours?

Now consider what might happen if we found that true passion and enthusiasm characterized our discipleship? What if we were as enthusiastic about Jesus as we might be about a birdie on a tough par 3 (to choose one admittedly wonderful moment!)? What if we spent as much time on our discipleship as we devote to a beloved hobby? Why don't we? Is it because we can't see the "payoff?" Is it because we simply don't want to? How might we discover an abiding and passionate devotion to Christ? How might a passion for Christ spill over into the rest of our lives, even those we've always thought didn't have much to do with "church.?"

Finally, you might share some stories of Christians who seem to be passionate disciples. What evidence is there of passion and enthusiasm? How do such people make you feel? Envious? Nervous?