

**Middle of the Road Kill Psalm 131; Revelation 3:1-3, 14-17; Matthew 15:29-38**  
**Saint Marks UMC, Charleston WV 2d Sunday after Pentecost (June 22) 2014**

**Psalm 131 O Lord, I am not proud; I have no haughty looks. I do not occupy myself with great matters, or with things that are too hard for me. But I still my soul and make it quiet. Like a child upon its mother's breast; my soul is quieted within me. O Israel, wait upon the Lord, from this time forth forevermore.**

**Matthew 15:29 Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there.<sup>30</sup> And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them,<sup>31</sup> so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.**

**<sup>32</sup>Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."<sup>33</sup> And the disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?"<sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish."<sup>35</sup> And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground,<sup>36</sup> he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.<sup>37</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over.<sup>38</sup> Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children.**

**Revelation 3:1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.**

**"I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.<sup>2</sup> Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.<sup>3</sup> Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. ...**

**<sup>14</sup>"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.**

**<sup>15</sup>"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!<sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.<sup>17</sup> For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.**

**Philip loved Valerie. She made him complete. When the trouble of the world surrounded him; when he felt like he could not carry his burden one more step, nor undertake one more task to make others happy, Valerie held him close and told him how much she loved him. He did not have to do anything to please her other than to be himself.**

**And in her embrace he felt at peace.**

**And in her love, he knew that he was good enough.**

And when the world was rushing madly about him, the sweet knowledge that she awaited him at home, and that her daily presence was enough, he was able to get through each day. Indeed, in her loving care, he grew stronger.

He no longer felt like he had to jump through everyone else's hoops; no longer needed to live up to everyone else's expectations. He knew that he was inherently good and that doing good things was its own reward.

And being healed from his insecurities, being held in her perfect unconditional love, brought him to a very good place in life. And they lived happily ever after ... well, no they did not.

For Valerie began to realize that Philip had lost his passion. Not just the pent up anxiety about trying to please everyone, but his passion. He went through the place of being loved and being content, down a slippery, sliding slope of torpor and malaise. He was no longer content, but now just sloppy.

Valerie began to leave little clip it notes around the house – quotations she had seen in magazines and on the internet, things like:

- There is no passion to be found playing small - in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.

Nelson Mandela

- It is your passion that empowers you to be able to do that thing you were created to do.

T. D. Jakes

- Nothing great in the world has ever been accomplished without passion.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

- Passion is one great force that unleashes creativity, because if you're passionate about something, then you're more willing to take risks.

Yo-Yo Ma

Valerie was so disheartened. She loved Philip and did so unconditionally. She knew that he had been healed of much which had made his life unbearable, but now it seemed like he didn't know how to LIVE life. He had gone from being miserable to now living miserably – without passion.

Philip, too, realized that something was amiss. He enjoyed not being under the pressure that once felt like it was caving in on him. He was so grateful for Valerie's unconditional love. But he realized now that he was taking her love for granted. When was the last time he had brought her flowers? When was the last time that he had shown her how much he loved her?

Valerie prayed to God to give her, if not an answer, at least a clue. Philip did not pray to God, other than sitting quietly on his pew, while his mind wandered during that quiet time of worship. Sometimes, he worked on a grocery list, in his mind.

Valerie realized that Philip had gone from discontent and dissatisfaction with himself, all the way to boredom.

And then one day, out of the clear blue it happened. Disaster came into their lives.

End of story.

- So, was the disaster an answer to the prayers of Valerie?

- Did God get so peeved with Philip's lukewarm approach to life that God decided to shake Philip up?

I don't know the answer to these or other questions. The mystery of God is still beyond my understanding, but more and more within my appreciation.

I do know this:

To feel as loved and embraced as the Psalmist expresses in Psalm 131 is one of the greatest blessings that can be experienced. As one Upper Room participant said last Thursday: ***"It's good to know that God's got it covered; it doesn't all depend on me."***

I also know this that when one lover in a pair grows lazy and unappreciative – when one lover in a pair loses their passion – it's not a good thing – **for EITHER ONE OF THEM.**

God won't quit loving us. But **when we lose our passion, we are about as worthless as lukewarm vomit.** Don't scrunch your nose and write a letter to the SPRC: those are God's words, not mine!

Hear just one more story:

***The explorer returned to his people, who were very eager to know about the Amazon. But how could he ever put into words the feelings that flooded his heart when he saw exotic flowers and heard the night sounds of the forest; when he sensed the danger of wild beasts or paddled his canoe over treacherous rapids.***

***He said, "Go and find out for yourselves." To guide them he drew a map of the river. They pounced upon the map. They***

***framed it in their town hall. They made copies of it for themselves. And all who had a copy considered themselves experts on the river, but, alas, they did not know its every turn and bend, how broad it was and how deep, where the rapids were and where the falls.***

We can't ever be passionate about what is not our own – about someone else's relationship with God.

Jesus' passionate compassion allowed him to feed miraculously. If we only try to explain the story and not enter into the power of that passionate compassion, then we have merely framed the map and put it on the wall.

- We may appreciate it.
- We may learn the descriptions about it.

But if it's not our own, it will never provide any passion – only some often misguided sense of duty.

**Having lost one's passion is sometimes hard to self-diagnose. Ask a close friend; ask your lover. If you don't like the answer, or if you are afraid to ask the question, then know the truth. Passion, or the lack thereof, can often best be seen by others.**

In the old movie, recently remade, *Karate Kid*, young Daniel comes to Mr. Myagi to learn karate. Before the wise old master will teach the lad the lessons of Karate, he tells him a parable:

**Walk on road, hm? Walk left side, safe.  
Walk right side, safe.  
Walk middle, sooner or later get squished like grape.  
Here, karate, same thing. Either you karate do "yes" or karate do "no." You karate do "guess so," get squished like grape.**

So, too, with Christianity. We cannot do it part way.

- **Either we should be Christians, with passion and creativity and daring to step out into the unknown, relying upon God's power where our own strength is not enough.**
- **Or we should not pretend we are Christians, but rather eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we surely shall die.**
- But we really cannot just pretend. In the words of Richard Foster: **If we don't seek the Kingdom of God first, we don't seek it at all.** And then, trying to walk down the middle of the road, we end up: SPLAT.

I know that there are some who have gone the way of Philip: once there was passion, but now the embers have grown dim. Don't say that you are not able. With God, all things are possible.

If you've lost your passion, get on your knees and ask God to give you either a challenge or troubles. It's better than being lukewarm you-know-what.

Perhaps this Native American Blessing will help you:

**May the Lord disturb you and trouble you,  
May the Lord set an impossible task before you,  
And dare you to meet it.  
May the Lord give you strength to do your best  
And then - but only then -  
May you be granted the Lord's Peace.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.