

Are we passionate about our work?

July 17, 2016

At first glance, the story of hospitality in Genesis and the story of hospitality in Luke seem to be saying to me, the opposite thing. In the story of Abraham we are told that he saw three men standing near him and he ran to meet them, bowing down to the ground and then requesting that he be allowed to wash their feet, feed them and see that they are refreshed. He was the ultimate host to three strangers and we are later told in Romans chapter 4 that Abraham believed God (that he would become the father of many nations as he had been promised) even when his own body was as good as dead and the barrenness of his wife Sarah, he did not weaken in his faith and it was reckoned to him a righteousness.

Genesis 18:1-10a

*The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he **ran** from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on-- since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham **hastened** into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready **quickly** three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." Abraham **ran** to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who **hastened** to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.*

They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son."

Note: We are told five times in the story that Abraham, Sarah or the servant hastened, ran or made ready quickly.

In our gospel story, we see another accounting of hospitality. Jesus has arrived at the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. I'm guessing that we have probably heard countless stories about the "one thing that Mary has chosen" and apparently her sister, Martha, has not. I'm betting that the moral of the story that we have been told is that it was better to sit at the feet of Jesus than labor to accommodate others. Am I right here?

But seeing the story of Abraham paired with this story of Martha made me wonder, just what was the thing that made Martha and Mary different. You see, the problem with Martha is not her hospitality. Just look at the difference in the attitude of Abraham and Martha. He is running to do the work; she is complaining to the Master.

Luke 10:38-42

*As Jesus and his disciples went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was **distracted** by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are **worried and distracted** by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."*

Martha becomes distracted and worried. She complains to the Lord that her sister is not working as hard as she is. She may be an effective organizer, a great cook, conscientious in all she does, but she is simply responsible...driven by duty, not passion.

What are the works in your life that brings you joy? What are the works in your life that when you've spent hours at it, you look up in amazement that the time has flown by? What are the works in your life

that you are called to?

Did I ever tell you that years ago, when I was at another church, I was asked to become a deacon? Now a deacon, in that particular fellowship was one who was in charge of hospitality – like wedding receptions and planning the Christmas party. You would never want me to be charge of a wedding reception. I flatly refused the offer! You see, I didn't understand what God really meant by being a deacon and it wasn't until I met a deacon here at St. James, that I actually understood what was the work I was being called to. I could have become a deacon in the other church, but I would have done it out of duty, not spiritual passion.

Yesterday, I had the privilege of sitting with George Zabriskie, as he is actively dying. I was with someone else who had a hymnal and together we sang songs to George, including his favorite one, Lift High the Cross. You see, I came to sing and pray, but I wasn't the one who was called to spend the night with him as Thyrsa was traveling home from Maine. I haven't been the one to sit and hold his hand or read Psalms to him. No, my part was small, but it was what I could do with passion and love.

Likewise in a church, it takes all of us working together, each bringing whatever gifts we have. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (Ephesians 2.10)

Friday night, St. James served at the community cafe. Not all are called to minister in this way. Perhaps you've tried it and while you might be willing to continue, if it's not your passion, take the risk to look for where else you might be called to serve. Perhaps you are being invited to demonstrate the sacraments to children be serving in Godly play. Perhaps you are being invited to strategize with leadership and listen to the voice of God about the direction of this particular fellowship of believers. Perhaps you are interested in serving the naked, the hungry, or those in prison. Perhaps you are being asked to be hospitable, making

this church, not just a friendly church, but also, one that has no distinction placed on anyone who comes through that door and is welcoming to all.

More than anything, passion is God's gift to us rather than anything we actually do. For each of us is called repeatedly, invited to turn away from something and toward something else. He invites us many times to turn in new directions. When we answer those calls, passionate spirituality happens. We cannot make these calls happen, but we can put ourselves in the position of hearing those calls when we practice some sort of spiritual rule in our life. In this way, prayer, scripture, receiving communion, gathering together every Sunday to worship, helping those in need, going on a retreat, these practices and many others are ways for us, like Mary, to sit at Jesus's feet as a disciple and listen to what he wants to tell us.

It was risky for Mary to sit as a disciple at the feet of Jesus in a culture that did not leave room for women to do such a thing. Yet here we all are today, taking time on a beautiful Sunday, to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen. I commend you all for being here today and every Sunday, because it is not what the world does today. You are being intentional, rather than conventional and God appreciates that in each one of you.

“We may find it risky, for all sorts of reasons, some of them self-imposed, to undertake spiritual practices, to answer the call to be continually converted, to become aflame with passionate spirituality or what Jesus calls ‘the one thing necessary’. We may, after all, find ourselves taken to unexpected places.

Passionate spirituality took a biblical farm hand named Amos away from the tending of sycamore trees and made him into a prophet of God. He responded to his call.

Passionate spirituality took a slave from Maryland's Eastern Shore

named Harriet Tubman and made her into the Moses of her people. She responded to her call.

Passionate spirituality took Oscar Romero, a conventional cleric from the tortured country of El Salvador and made him into a voice for the voiceless. He responded to his call.” *(taken from Sermons that Work)*

Passionate spirituality can take you and me, normal, ordinary folk and take us to extraordinary and unexpected places if we will embrace the call. And I can guarantee you, without reservation, that the journey will be worth the cost.