

Prayer & Passion

Luke 22:39-46

Being passionate is something that we like to tell people we are - often in the dullest voice - "I'm right passionate about communication, I am..." At which point everyone loses the will to live and switches off - it's up there with people who claim that they're 'hilarious' - I mean, Really?? Who told you that? Why are you telling me that - surely if that's true, I will discover it to be the case soon enough as we spend time together... I've mentioned to some of you the genius of Joel's GCSE drama teacher who would come out and prep the audience before a student written and performed piece - she would say, 'now this one is a tense drama, so prepare to be scared', or 'this one is a comedy so you will find yourself wanting to laugh out loud' ... These heralds of intention or misapprehension are okay in their place, but nothing beats the raw reality of comedy which catches you unawares and makes you belly-laugh with delight or the energy and commitment that is the passion which ignites and consumes a person... passion is hot and welds you to the spot where it is alive... Passion is not for the beige and pedestrian, it is a shot of colour into a grey and dismal world... People may use it as an insult - sneering through it "well, that was certainly passionate" as though it lacked rootedness - but here's the thing, for passion to burn, it must have a source, a fuel to burn and a spark to light it... Without the basis for passion, it soon runs out and is useless... with fuel, there is passion for eternity - which is where we find Jesus.

For Jesus, his devotion to his Father and his love for people wherever he found them led to the point where he was wringing his heart out in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, from the sharing of the Last Supper, in which he would declare the coming of the New Covenant to singing in the Garden of Gethsemane and counselling his disciples to pray "so that they do not fall into temptation". It is at this point that we see the necessary-ness of prayer for Jesus. Yes, we have seen him teach the Lord's Prayer which is about focus on God and the Salvation we have in God. We have seen him teaching persistence, in ask, seek, knock and also how he withdrew at certain times to spend time with God, but now it is the hard thing, the painful and excruciating thing that Jesus must face and it is necessary for him to work it out in the presence of his Father before the next phase of what we know as Jesus' Passion kicks up a notch.

Jesus prays about this because he cares. He cares that God loves the world this much, he cares that there are bruised and broken people who are struggling with sickness, guilt and the things that sin has done to them. He cares that his disciples are faithful to hold fast to his promise even when he is being tortured and hurt and going

through awful, awful things done to him by people of his own faith tradition and then by the State at the request of the people who should have been on his side. When people cry out in exasperation “give me strength!”, It is a hark back to this prayer in the Garden. Jesus prays like he means it, because he DOES mean it and it’s too important to waft into with the vague sense that it will be okay because GOD HAS THIS. God Does have this. But we need to know that we are properly listening to and being willing to honour and serve him... which is why we have 24/7 prayer, and why we have prayer meetings and prayer nights devoted to particular issues and ministries. We gathered for HOURS to pray for a new minister - and to send Gavin, the boys and I to the right place in ministry... WHY? Because although GOD has this, we knew it would be a painful and complicated process with potential for all sorts to go wrong. We wanted to show our commitment to God’s perfect will and ways and to be part of it.

We need angel’s strength, sent from God in times of big activity on the Behalf of God’s kingdom. We need the companionship of others who will pray alongside. We need the grace and power of God to do what is necessary to bless and uphold the ministry and work of his Son where we are. And it is costly. It costs us to leave behind people we love and to seek the new thing. It is costly to trust a new minister with the precious things of your heart and the vision that you have for the mission and purpose of the church in your area... so we seek the face of God, knowing that this is our home and the things of earth are part of our pilgrim purpose as we travel on together in prayer, but in different locations.

As I preach this message today, I am conscious of the people around the UK and around the world for whom this is hard. Trusting is hard, especially when well-built ministry is systematically dismantled and community of faith is eroded. It is in these times that we passionately seek our focus on the face of Christ, who is our strength and our Bright Hope for each day. We have all had hopes and disappointment in the Church, in our ministers and in our denomination... but we ask -passionately and persistently - that God will renew our strength in him so that we can do the things and be the people for HIS GLORY... I’m properly passionate about this! If church is old and smells a bit fusty - you can’t make it new and shiny - only God can make it new - its what he does, but your passion for this will be evident in the persistence and commitment of your prayers. You are in... all in... like James Bond pushing all his chips across the table in a classic Bond film, against the odds, against the advice, all in to beat the baddie!!

My generation used to speak of being sold out for God. And many many have wandered away from Christ as their first love and sought satisfaction in hobbies and career with a nod to a watered down gospel. I pray for revival among them, and among all of us.

It is God's Spirit alone who brings passion to our faith, based on the deep truths of God's Covenant Promises and ignited by the Holy Spirit we SHINE in prayer, we SHINE in worship, incandescent with the radiance of God's Glory... This is being sold out for God, abandoned to his will and his purposes... This is where our passion comes from, where our hope is found and where our prayers are answered.

For Jesus, as he surrendered himself into the hands of sinners, he gave himself wholly over to God's Plan, willing and determined. Knowing that the physical torment, the agony of separation from God would come, but confident that when he leapt out - not stepped out, we are talking passion here and this was no mere toe in the water - when he leaped out with a faith and trust in God, held passionately by him, to endure the suffering and agony that would come, he did it with his whole self.

Faith in God, the salvation we know, the hope in Jesus is more than a toe in the water. We pray with passion when we allow ourselves to be wholly part of God's plan.

Gavin, Aidan, Joel and I have loved being your minister at Sprowston and Old Catton; looking after Rosebery Road and Heartsease Lane and the Circuit. God is not finished yet. We face the future confident in Jesus' salvation and in the ministry he has given - passionate to serve him - not because it's the right thing to say, but because of the life and joy, the hope and courage that God has given to us.

Take care of one another, remain faithful, preach the Gospel, love Jesus and keep praying. Always. And know that God is building his church with you - you might not see how, but he will surprise you, just as Jesus surprised Mary and the disciples on the morning of his Glorious Resurrection. To him be Glory throughout the Ages.

Amen