

***Embrace Your Dreams***  
***Jesus' Teachings – Week 6***

So, are you a passionate person? I hope you are. I am passionate — passionate about gardening, faith, church, people, reading and, of course, coffee.

Sometimes passion gets a bad rap in the church. It's something about not letting your passions control you because you are going to end up in big trouble. Interesting — Jesus sees it differently.

Today we continue to study his teachings, because we know that Jesus came among us to teach us how to live. He says so in Matthew, chapter 28. These are Jesus' last words in Matthew's Gospel:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus desires us to follow what he taught us because he came to show us the best way to live.

The question, of course, is, if Jesus shows us the best way to live and our lives aren't working, maybe—just maybe—we have to deal with the reality that we have somehow missed something and need to look again at his teachings. I know that is how it is for me lately. Let me share from my life as I have been looking at our teaching today.

First, a confession: I confess I am a stress eater. Tuesdays, when I write my sermons, are the worst days for this! I snack and eat all kinds of stuff I don't really want to eat, but what I can only describe as "creative anxiety" pushes me in this direction.

I want so much to put a message together that helps, that speaks to our lives, that enables us to connect with God in Christ, it is like there is this big ball of energy that comes out and I have to channel it someplace, and food is my default setting. I guess if I didn't feel so passionate about this, it wouldn't be such an issue, but I do and it is.

Some of you have the same default setting as I do. Others of you take that energy you get and channel it into shopping, or pornography, or drugs—maybe prescription, maybe not—or maybe for you it is alcohol. It could also be something that you might not think of, like gossip or complaining or talking badly about people you know little of, or whatever thing you — I — really don't want to 'fess up to.

So we are going to talk about this today. We are going to talk about desire, passion, energy, and how we live with it instead of allowing it to have its way with us. For what I hear in Jesus' teaching is in fact that our problem isn't we have too much passion and desire or dreams, but rather that we don't have enough.

Let's start with a story from Jesus' life that is found in John's Gospel, chapter 4:4-29. I want to tell you the story instead of reading it. The story is this.

Jesus is passing through Samaria, a town no self-respecting Jew would want to visit, and his disciples have gone off to get food. Jesus, worn out, sits down at what is referred to as Jacob's Well. While sitting there, a woman comes to get water. Now she

is going to the well to get water at a time when it is very hot, and her hope would be that she wouldn't run into anybody else, because it seems she is a bit notorious, or at least, not very upstanding.

She meets Jesus there, and they have a conversation about her giving him water and Jesus' having something better than well water, something he calls "living water." Well, she wants this living water, because it sounds amazing: you will never again be thirsty and you won't ever have to return to the well. Jesus responds to her desire by telling her to go get her husband, and then the story comes out.

Husband #1 didn't work out; husband #2 wasn't much better; husband #3 was not so hot either; #4 was much of the same; and #5 didn't quite work out. So now she thought better than to get married, and is instead living with a guy.

But when I said *the story came out*, it wasn't because she told it. Instead, Jesus revealed her story to her, and she was, as you can imagine, shocked he knew AND shocked he knew and yet was talking to her.

This is a woman who is searching. She wants to have the life she sees others have. She has a desire to experience life, to be OK, to have life go at least well enough that she doesn't have to come out in the midday sun in order to get water. But things aren't working out.

Jesus doesn't shame her, maybe because what has driven her to all these men is her desire for more in her life — more happiness, more joy, more love — but somehow it hasn't worked out.

Her desire for a better life isn't wrong. Jesus doesn't shame her out of it. Instead, he invites her deeper into her desire for more life. And even though when he gets too close she starts talking about politics (she pushes the conversation to where they are to worship God), he won't let her off, and he reveals to her—this broken woman who is an outsider in many ways—that he has life-giving water to give because he is the Messiah. She then becomes the first preacher, the first one to share with others who Jesus is.

Her problem, for Jesus, isn't her desire. God made us to have desires and dreams, to have passions. They are there for a reason. Her problem is she doesn't take her life, her passion or desire, seriously enough to find what will really fill it. It's as if she doesn't think she matters enough to take things seriously, and so she goes for a patch here and a patch there and it just doesn't work.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever had a desire that you tried to fill, only to find you filled it with the wrong stuff? You know, you wanted love but met the need with lust. You wanted to contribute to people's lives, but met the need by controlling others. You wanted to live a good life, but instead became caged in by your choices.

Maybe you felt bad about your desire, but the issue—from a faith perspective— isn't that desire is wrong. Instead, we are called to take it more seriously than we do, and to find what we really need to fill it.

In the parables, Jesus talks about it as finding a treasure in a field and selling all to get it. Finding a precious pearl and selling all to possess it. This seriousness says that it matters that our desires are filled by the right things, and neither talking ourselves out of our need or trying to deal with it by purchasing a poor substitute will work.

Sometimes we think faith is about a list of nos, about a *cutting off* of desire. Instead, I think it's about taking our desires so seriously that we study them and help them to find expression in a way that is life-giving, not death-dealing.

One way this is played on in the scriptures is that you don't hear the party line of *whatever it is, just say no*. In case you haven't noticed, it is hard to say no; our wills are weak, we are, to varying degrees, broken, and we get ourselves in all kinds of trouble and situations we really don't want to be in, again and again and again.

Like the woman at the well with man after man, you and I end up not understanding that many of our desires aren't the problem. The problem is our lack of imagination, our lack of holistic understanding of human nature as we get our desires met.

Let's look at an example of how this is played out in real life. The early church dealt with people not too different than how we are, and one issue they had was stealing. Why do people steal? Lots of reasons I guess, but one reason is the thrill of stealing. There is a rush associated with it that is pleasurable. How did the church deal with this? In Ephesians 4 it says,

Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.

The teaching doesn't end with, "STOP DOING THAT, YOU IMMORAL PERSON!" Instead, it says, Yeah, you like that rush? We have a much better rush for you. Use those hands that you use to steal, and instead use them to create something so you can give it to someone in need. When you do that, the rush you get from really helping someone is much bigger and longer lasting than the rush you find in stealing.

That applies to just about everything. The rush you get from whatever haunts you is nothing compared to what you will find when you figure out how to turn it toward something life-giving.

For myself, I thought the best I could do when I feel this anxiety that comes out of my writing is to eat. But you know, that isn't the best I can do. Through the power of the risen Christ—which I find gets expressed in imagination and creativity—I can take that passion I feel for communicating and, instead of letting it drive me to eat, I can begin to imagine another way of dealing with it.

So now I breathe, journal, pray, take a break, listen to music, and sometimes just laughing at myself. Because the reality is, I don't feel any better when I give into the behavior. Maybe for the quick rush of it I do, but more than that, not so much. And the natural consequences of my behavior aren't something I want in my life.

I do know that I cannot stop the feelings I get when I write, and I do know that my stress eating comes from my desire to take care of myself. But I am not taking care of myself when I make bad choices. So the question then becomes, how do I authentically honor my desire?

You have God-given desires. Desires to live a life of joy and peace. Desires to take care of yourself in the midst of your anxiety and stress. Desires not to be alone, but to be in deep and authentic relationships. Desires to express yourself in a way that gives you, and others, life.

Too often you and I give expression to our desires in a way that leads us down a path we don't want to travel again. We think it will help, but if we are honest, we will admit that so far it has only offered temporary results. Like the water in Jacob's Well, it

calms our thirst for the moment, and unlike the *living water* Jesus offers the woman at the well, what we do can be anything but life-giving.

I collect rocks; not just any rocks, but heart shaped rocks. I have them on my front porch, and I see them every day. One time I was in Catalina, walking on the beach with Jacob and Jeff, and my attention was focused on looking at the rocks to find some more for my collection. I found a couple and pulled my shirt out as a way to hold them. Soon, my shirt was filled with various heart-shaped rocks.

But then I saw one that was a much better heart shape. I didn't have any room for another rock, I was full up. But I looked at it, and it was much better than the ones I had, so I had to decide whether I would let go of some of the rocks in order to take on some better ones. Because they were just rocks, it was an easy choice to let go of one and pick up something better.

So let me ask you: What are the rocks you carry around because you cannot imagine anything better? Are you leading the best kind of life, the kind of life Jesus came to give us, *life and life abundant*?

What do you need to let go of today? What do you hold onto because you cannot imagine yourself making a different, a better, choice? What do you need to use your creativity and imagination on so that you choose behavior that is life-giving and honors that you are as a child of God?

Today you found a rock on your seat when you came in. I want you to hold this rock and think about what it is of which you need to let go.

Maybe it is judgments, maybe it is control, maybe it is blame, maybe it is gossip, maybe it is some time of bad habit or addiction. Whatever it is, let this rock symbolize it. Then after some time for silence and prayer, I invite you to bring the rock forward and make a pile on the altar.

Don't worry about people watching you; you are among friends today.

The second part of this is the insert in 24/7—this is for you to write on during

9AM: Prayer time

10:40AM: Offertory time

Let us pray