

Song of Solomon 2:8-13

*The voice of my beloved!
Look, he comes,
leaping upon the mountains,
bounding over the hills.
My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag.
Look, there he stands
behind our wall,
gazing in at the windows,
looking through the lattice.
My beloved speaks and says to me:*

*'Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;
for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtle-dove
is heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.*

JAMES 1:17-27

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

The Word of the Lord...

This morning I want to talk about passion. Why not? The Bible does.

We don't often talk about passion in church, probably because it is so close to one of the seven deadly sins. The fact that an entire book of the Bible is based on passion hasn't salvaged it. There is no passion Sunday where in between sips of cool water and fanning ourselves various passages from Song of Solomon are read.

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*'Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;*

In the contemporary version it's translated: *My beloved speaks and says to me: How you doin'?*

Passion is a gift from God and we know just how powerful it can be.

Song of Solomon paints a vivid picture of passion and whether it is an analogy for God's love for us or an Old Testament Harlequin novel, it is about a burning in our soul, a yearning for more and it certainly gets our attention. It is a lectionary reading for this week and if you were to put a figure on the cover to represent this book it would be Fabio – hair flowing, eyes simmering, shirt open.

Another lectionary passage for this Sunday is James. The figure on the cover of the book of James would be less like Fabio, and a little more like.... Bill Gates – forehead glowing, eyes covered in glasses, shirt covered by a sweater vest.

BUT! Just as passionate. James is also about a burning in our soul, a yearning for more and it should get our attention... only the passion of James is more about compassion.

There are other similarities between our Old Testament and New Testament readings today. One is that neither one of them always got a lot of respect around the Biblical scholar water cooler. Song of Solomon because it makes everyone a little nervous to be talking about such things and James because... well, James is just different.

James is kind of like the weird uncle that ran for President out of his newspaper delivery business in Brooklyn that no one in the family wants to talk about. He is not universally liked – the grandfather of our denomination, Martin Luther, called his letter "an epistle of straw."

He claims it is the lack of the evangelical that bothers him, but family rumor has it that Grandpa Martin Luther never liked Uncle James because Uncle James talks about being doers of faith and Grandpa's entire Reformation was based on grace through faith and NOT by works, as Uncle James would have you believe.

At first glance it does seem as though James – *But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers* – goes totally against the teachings of the Apostle Paul – *For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law*. You know how Martin Luther was going to solve this problem? He wanted to take the Epistle of James out of the Bible – kick him out of the family.

I do not nearly have that much authority and it is my contention – forgive me Mr. Luther – that the Apostle Paul and James are not very far apart at all.

When cell phones were first coming into the mainstream picture – which really wasn't that long ago, I went with a couple of friends who were shopping for a cell phone. You may remember that it involved calling plans, rates, calling areas, firstborn children, etc...

I will never forget the conversation as the wife Pat was focused on what they were getting, while the husband, Bob was focused on what that means.

I'll try to explain by giving you a sample conversation between Bob and Pat and the salesperson:

BOB: Now your advertisement says that if we buy two phones, we get one free...does that come with a specific calling plan?

SALESPERSON: Yes, the first phone is 125 and the second one is 70 with a 50 dollar rebate. Of course you have to buy the 100 minute plan for 75.99 but that includes long distance.

PAT: Ooh, a green one!

BOB: 75.99? This says 200 for 45.99, no long distance, but we get call forwarding.

SALESPERSON: That's our coastal package, you want the global package for 300, 89.99.

PAT: Can we get one that does that cool flippy thing?

You get the point. Bob and Pat were getting the same thing - cellular phone service. One of them was focused on what they get (the green phone that does that flippy thing) and the other one was focused on what that means (20 minutes, \$25.99, no long distance).

The Apostle Paul and the epistle writer James are getting the same thing - grace by faith NOT by works, but Paul is focusing on what we get and James is focusing on what that means for our lives.

They would both agree that true faith is an active faith.
And they both have a passion for their faith.

Make no mistake about it, James may not be as out there as Song of Solomon but underneath that sweater vest is a heart that pounds for the Gospel and his eyes simmer with a passion for service and mission.

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness... be doers of the word, and not

merely hearers who deceive themselves.... If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

There are reasons passion and anger get a bad rap – we have seen far too many cases of either one being misused. How many of us get ridiculous when our internet doesn't go as fast as we think it should? Or when the cashier and the person ahead of us in line *clearly* have no sense of how busy we are? Or when traffic does not move to the side to let us through.

Has anyone ever seen someone in the car behind them absolutely losing their minds in rage due to some incident that whether real or imagined is a *major* over-reaction? Studies have shown that road rage and other mountains of anger directed at molehill issues is a phenomenon found mainly in developed countries.

Pastor and writer Rob Bell has a quote where he says, "Some people are looking for a fight because they aren't already in one."

Our world needs us to care more about the orphan than about being cut off in traffic.
Our world needs us to get angrier at the amount of people who go to bed hungry, than about the grocery store line being too long.
Our world needs us to feel the burn over the injustices imposed by people in power throughout this globe, rather than about how slowly the newsfeed is getting to us on our computers.

Our world is absolutely on fire. And sometimes the only way to fight fire is with fire. In fire fighting terms, it's called a back burn. It's a controlled, focused fire used to combat the out-of-control fires that burn around us.

Where is your passion?

What is burning in your soul?

What has you yearning for more justice? More kindness? More mercy?

What makes you stop in your tracks and think, "Wow. Someone should really do something about that."

Maybe that someone is you.

In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.