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Today's reading is Psalm 16. "Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord, apart from you I have no good thing.' I say to the holy people who are in the land, 'They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.' Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips. Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup. You make my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the Lord who counsels me. Even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices. My body also will rest secure because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful ones see decay. You make known to me the path of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. [Silence] Good morning. I'm just checking that our live stream is still going because my parents are watching because they want to make sure I don't say anything about them. We'll show them. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for the love that you show us. Thank you so much that you are a good, good father who comes near to us, who cares for us like a father tenderly caring for his children. God, I pray that as I speak today that you will speak through me, that your Holy Spirit will touch every heart here and fill us with your truth. Open our eyes to understand who you are and who we are in you. God, I pray that anything that I have written down here today that is not your word and not from you will simply bounce off our ears, but that your pure truth will saturate our hearts. In Jesus name, Amen. Well, back when I was, if we got, it's been a while since I've given a message. So in case there's any visitors here, I'm Matt Klossmeyer. I've been coming to this church since I was four and I was the interim pastor before Keith got here and that was like five years ago and that blows my mind. I also served as the youth pastor here and back when I was serving as the youth pastor, there was a line from a cartoon that we all used to quote each other. In one particular episode, there was a planet called the Neutral Planet and that's where the neutral people lived and as their name suggests, these people had no strong opinions or feelings one way or the other on any matter. Well, one particular scene, the president of the neutral people was standing in his waiting room in his war room and he was watching this imminent catastrophe that was about to kill them all and the president of the neutral people turned to his aid and said, "If I don't survive, tell my wife hello." We say that line a lot. I feel like I should speak today on passionate Christianity. The idea for this sermon comes, as many of my ideas do, out of the conviction that the Holy Spirit has brought into my own life and so as always, the primary person that I'm preaching here to today is myself but hopefully the rest of you can get something out of it as well. When I felt conviction of the lack of passion in my faith, I began reading the Bible with new eyes, looking for heart, looking for emotion and what I discovered is that passion is not just some nice little bonus, it is not the privilege of the super religious but it is the inseparable foundation of the Christian life. The Bible is the story of a passionate God who created a passionate people and calls them to live a passionate life and so today I'm going to speak to you about some of the different ways that we have been called to live passionately. Passion number one, love God and others. Some of you young people later on can go ask the older people where I got the background for that slide from and if you know where I got the background from, you're one of the older people. Passion number one, love God and others. If I were to ask you to come up with a Bible verse as an example of how we are supposed to live passionately, most of you would probably start with Mark 12 30 through 31. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself and that is a fantastic example of what I'm talking about, well done. But this phrase is not described in the Bible as good advice or one of ten steps to a better you. No, Jesus taught us that to love is the greatest commandment. Our Creator says that the single most important thing that I, his creation, must do is love him and others. To love is number one. So when I get caught up with all the other do's and don'ts, do this don't do that, I must beware that I haven't missed out on the big number one and I often do. I look at how often I volunteer, how much I tithe and I love looking at all the terrible things that I don't do and I say check, check, check, done. But Paul convicts me in 1st Corinthians 13 which I'm going to read from the message translation. "If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If I speak God's word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day and if I have faith that says to a mountain jump and it jumps but I don't have love, I'm nothing. If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So no matter what I say, what I believe and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love." Friends, I can tick off every other commandment and still be completely bankrupt if I don't love. Before I started working on this sermon, if you had asked me to rate myself as a Christian, I probably would have started thinking along the lines of, "Well, I go to church most Sundays and I volunteer. I haven't caused any grievous bodily harm. I probably need to read my Bible more," and so on, listing all of my behaviors. But love, if it makes the list, would not be near the top where God says it belongs. I'm a little bit concerned because I threw together 85 slides for this presentation, this PowerPoint, and I may be crippling our little laptop back there. I'm sorry. Do your best. Love needs to be at the top of the list of everything that I do. Love needs to be the top of the list of how I rate myself as a Christian. I have to constantly remind myself of this. When that homeless person asks me for food, God doesn't command me to give them food and an irritated eye roll. He commands me to give them love and also food. And that's hard for me and it might be hard for you, but hopefully God will just keep sending you homeless people to practice on like he does to me. We can see Jesus directly dealing with people who had this problem right after asking the Pharisees if it was okay to heal someone on the Sabbath. In Mark 3.5 we read, "And Jesus looked around at the Pharisees with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart." These were the most religiously, behaviorally correct men of their day. Every eye dotted and T crossed. They were being asked, "What's more important, legalism or love?" And they didn't answer because they had for so long practiced legalism, but at that moment they knew that love was the right answer and they just couldn't say it. So they didn't say anything. And it says, "Jesus was angry and grieved at their hardness of heart. Our Creator and Lord becomes angry and grieved when I check off all the other do's and don'ts on my list that have no love in my heart." Love is that foundational to the Christian life. Before I go on I'm going to make a confession. Sometimes I have a hard time feeling loved toward God and I'm sorry and that's terrible, but I'm telling you in case any of you have ever experienced that same thing. It's not because he isn't amazing and loving and lovely and wonderful, but the reason I sometimes have a hard time loving God, if you'll permit a metaphor, is that when I don't spend time near the fire I grow cold. We live in a world that robs us of our knowledge and understanding of God. For example, once upon a time I had friends I loved and foods I enjoyed and experiences that were life-changing, but like a photograph left in the sun little by little day by day my passion towards those things has faded. And in the same way when my busy life gets me distracted so that I don't read about his goodness from his word, when I don't offer up expectant prayers and see them get answered, when I don't spend time in communion allowing his spirit to fill my heart with his fruit, well that's when the realness of God fades in my heart and in my mind and my love grows cold. If you ever find yourself in this place just remember it's like keeping a fire going. You have to tend it. You have to keep returning to it. Prayer, Bible, communion, and not all at once, and certainly not all on Sunday morning. Spread it out. Don't try to absorb a whole day's worth of heat in 15 minutes in the morning or a whole week's worth on Sunday morning. That's not how it works. Get enough heat for the moment and then go do your thing and then come back to the fire and then go do your thing and so on. Let me conclude this point by saying loving God does not negate my keeping of his commandments. In fact keeping his commandments is how I love him. The point here is this. His love causes my love which causes my obedience. My obedience doesn't cause anything, not his love towards me and not his salvation. My obedience is the result of my love and it is the evidence of my love. So when I'm tempted to start thinking, "Oh I love you so much God. It doesn't matter how I treat that person." Well if my love is real I will keep his commandments. Passion number two, hate. Now sorry if jumping so quickly from a section on love to a section on hate has caused some of your trains of thought to derail. So let me give you a quick reminder. We're talking about passionate Christianity and one of the ways to be passionate is to passionately hate. Now I'm sure that you're thinking, "Matthew I didn't tune out during the last 10 minutes. You were just going on and on about love and my Sunday school teacher told me that hate is wrong." Well that's right when we're talking about other people. We are called to love other people. But in the Bible we see verses such as Psalm 97 10 which says, "Hate evil you who love the Lord." So I'm here today to suggest maybe you need a little more hate in your heart. Of course I'm being a little bit silly but I'm also deliberately attacking an insidious feel-good theology that runs contrary to our gospel. I cringe when I hear a Christian say, "I just can't accept what the Bible says about something unpleasant." They would rather believe in a God of their own invention than a God of the Bible because that's more comfortable. And I'm well aware of the feeling of fear that grips me when my faith collides with our culture. But when Scripture runs contrary to political correctness but God is greater than the culture we live in and our relationship with Him is more important than our relationship with people. And this is why the Bible teaches us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Because when we fear God and respect His holy standards more than we fear what people are going to say about us then we will finally be able to live out the lives God has called us to live. Now the Bible tells us that our hearts towards other people should be full of love just like God's heart towards other people. But when it comes to sin and wickedness and evil we need to have God's heart towards those things also which is hate. Here's some examples from the book of Psalms. "You hate all who do iniquity. I hate the assembly of evildoers. I hate those who regard vain idols. I hate the work of those who fall away. I hate every false way. I hate those who are double-minded. I hate and despise falsehood." I know some of those verses sound like they were talking about hating people but we know from what God did at the cross just how much God loves everyone. Not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. The vicious bloody cross simultaneously displays God's love for people and his hatred of sin. What we're talking about here is that old saying, "Hate the sin, love the sinner." But my weakness is really not how I deal with other people's sin. Oh it's easy to hate other people's sin because well they're not me. The reason I bring this up is because I and maybe you need to do a better job hating my own sin. I tell a little white lie because well yes the dress does make you look fat and no I don't want to get into it right now. And God forgives me right? And I shake my head and roll my eyes at my trivial little sin. "Sorry God," I say as if I stole the last popped heart or forgot to hold the door for someone behind me. Millennials have this phrase, "Sorry not sorry." It's what you say when you're supposed to say I'm sorry but you're really not. It's funny that parents teach us not to lie but they also demand that we say sorry when we absolutely are not sorry at all. And that's where that phrase comes from. But what does God say about little white lies? Revelation 21 8, "All liars will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death." This verse says that unbelievers and murderers and idolaters and the cowardly and all liars go to the lake of fire. Big sins and little sins are all still sin and God hates sin. He lake of fire hates sin and so should I. Song of Songs 2 15 says that the little foxes spoil the vineyards and in this metaphor I mean that the little foxes are my little sins and the vineyard is my life, my faith, my Christian walk and my usefulness to the Lord. This hate also needs to extend into my conversation more. I have observed in my own life being asked, "Matt what do you think of cherries?" and I say, "Oh I hate cherries." And someone else will say, "Matt what do you think of pornography?" And for fear of offending my co-workers I'll say, "Oh well you know it's not really my thing." What is wrong with me? I make a big deal about a little thing like cherries and a little thing of a big deal like pornography. It happens when I fear men more than I fear God. Those answers need to be reversed. Failure to hate sin hurts the work of the church. When some other church tries to cover up a sex abuse scandal instead of dealing with it like the cancerous lake of fire sin that it is, that is what unbelievers just find unbelievable. When people observe Christians altering or ignoring parts of Scripture to avoid difficult conversations and make their life easier, they see the hypocrisy and they turn away from the Scripture that might save them. God is more than a God of feel good and love. He is a God of justice. He didn't just wink away my sin and forget about it. He nailed it to the cross. When someone asks you, "How could God allow all the sin in the world?" you tell them God has created two things to deal with all of the sin in the world. A lake of fire and a bloody cross on Calvary and every single sin will be dealt with at one of those two places. God hates sin and so should I with a passion. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he said, "Hey, you know that guy in your church who's committing that gross terrible sin and is not repenting of it and is bragging about it? Kick him out of the church unless he repents." He says, Paul says, "I'm not telling you to judge people who aren't believers but you need to be ruthless about sin when someone calls themselves a believer. Do not eat with them, do not associate with them unless they repent, in which case welcome them back with arms wide open." That's 1 Corinthians 5, the Klossmeyer paraphrase version. This isn't an act of hatred towards that person, it's act firstly of love towards God and secondly an act of grace towards that person because by doing so I'm driving them towards repentance. Without repentance there's no forgiveness. If I allow them to continue on in their sin I'm just making them comfortable on their trip to hell and that's not an act of love at all. Many of you are parents so you already know what I'm talking about. Doing a thing that makes someone unhappy but for their own good. I just hope you can carry that over into your relationships here and it's harder for me having not been in that position. We humans desire to avoid conflict and that makes the parts of the gospel like love and peace and forgiveness really pop but we can't let our fallen human desire for conflict avoidance cause us to live out only half of the gospel. If sin could just be ignored there would be no need for the cross but there was a cross so let's not take lightly the sin that caused it to happen. Love sinners but hate sin. Passion number three rejoice. I don't need to spend too long on this one because it goes hand in hand with loving God. Everything about my new life in Christ is an occasion to celebrate. God has chosen to adopt me into his family. God has taken away the penalty for my sins. God will replace my broken earthly body with an eternal perfect body. God will replace this broken messed up world with a paradise. Death is not the end and sin is not the victor. He has prepared for us eternal pleasures which comes from that verse from Psalm 16 which we read just before this. Paul in his letter to the Romans chapter 12 verse 12 reminds us to be joyful in hope. In Philippians several times he reminds us to rejoice in the Lord. When I have renewed my mind with the truth from God's Word I will become transformed into someone who can see beyond the temporary and out of this new mindset is where our worship ought to come from. My friend Anthony Turner once said what is worship? Recognition of such excellence, quality, and beauty of what I am beholding that it demands a response from my heart. Anything less is not worship and that convicts me. Many times I've shown up here ready to punch the singing clock and that is wrong. The Bible doesn't say thou shalt arrive at a house of worship early upon Sunday morning where upon thou shalt make at least three songs with thy mouth and then thou shalt be saved. No, no God hates joyless singing. In fact in Isaiah 29 13 we read then the Lord said these people draw near with their words and honor me with their lip service but they remove their hearts far from me and their reverence for me consists of tradition learned by rote. And in Malachi 110 oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates that you might not uselessly kindle fire on my altar. I am not pleased with you says the Lord of hosts nor will I accept an offering from you. Not singing is better than joyless singing, loveless singing. But God is so good. I mean even aside from the amazing work of redemption he is still the Almighty Creator. Even a painting ought to give honor to its painter how much more the wonder of creation should give glory to the Creator. And once I factor in his unfathomable love towards me well he deserves the very best my heart has to offer. Now those of you who know me know I don't always wear my joy on my face. The truth is many times I identify with Paul in 2nd Corinthians 4 8 & 9 when he describes himself as being hard-pressed perplexed persecuted and struck down. But how does that verse go? We are hard-pressed on every side yet not crushed. We are perplexed but not in despair. Persecuted but not forsaken. Struck down but not destroyed. When the weight of the world threatens to overwhelm me I start preaching to myself like David in Psalm 103 bless the Lord oh my soul all that is within me bless his holy name. And even though I may not show it too well on the outside in my heart I find that the joy of the Lord is my strength. So my rejoicing does double duty it gives me the strength I need and it gives God the glory he's due. My final point is passionate prayer. You know all those verses I just read about God not wanting my dead lifeless praise also applies to my prayers. God does not demand that I bow my head and mumble before he allows me to eat. He is not a God who demands hollow chanting contrary to other religions that's not what Christian prayer is. Christian prayer is talking to God. More specifically prayer is the effective communication with a God who listens. It's an act of faith as James 1 6 reminds us because we offer prayers up to one who we don't see with our eyes and it's an act performed in the name of Jesus because we as sinners don't have the righteousness necessary to approach God. And so Christ credited his righteousness to us but most importantly prayer is a conversation between a father and his child. It is grounded in his passionate love for us. Daddy wants to spend time with his children. You know I'm not a parent but I'm willing to bet that God gives us children so that we can feel the hunger for their affection the way he hungers for ours. Did you ever make that connection? As you were sitting there wishing your kids would talk to you more God is wishing the same thing from you. Prayer should be passionate because it is the conduit that God uses to bring about his kingdom in the world. When Jesus tells us that the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few what solution does he give to that problem? Does he say get out there and reap that harvest? No. In Matthew chapter 9 he tells us the harvest truly is plentiful but the laborers are few therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Yes he wants us to be those laborers to be those missionaries but prayer is the channel through which the work is accomplished. That's why we emphasize prayer so much at this church. We can make all the clever plans and programs and activities but if it's not grounded in prayer then Psalm 127 tells us that unless the Lord builds the house they that labor in vain who build it. Some people don't believe in prayer. The story often goes I prayed for a loved one and my prayer didn't get answered but God did hear their prayer and he answered it in the most loving way possible because those people who we pray for God loves them more than we are capable of loving them. I can't explain the outcome to every prayer but I know that God's heart is greater than our hearts so I trust him and despite the tears I might cry at a particular outcome I still praise God in faith because he is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think and as someone who has kept praying despite having many prayers even important prayers not get answered the way I wanted. I can tell you that not only does prayer work but that most prayers do get answered the way I want them to. In my experience unexpected outcomes to prayers are the exception. Some of you that strikes you as being unusual or untrue and if so check your heart. Do what I did. Start a prayer journal and just start praying about everything big and small write down every prayer request you made to God and leave a blank line between each request and then when that prayer issue finally gets resolved write down how it got resolved. There's a lot more happy outcomes in my book than sad but don't go into it looking to disprove prayer. You have to pray in faith believing that you will receive what you ask for. Faith is key. I'm going to conclude with a description of God's passionate love for you and it comes from Luke 1520 and I'm paraphrasing. "But while you were still a long way off your father saw you and was overcome with compassion for you and he ran and he threw his arms around your neck and he kissed you again and again. God deserves more than empty loveless ritual. To love is the greatest commandment. Sin deserves our contempt. Worship and prayer only have value when they come from a heart of love." We're going to have quiet time now. We're going to let the Holy Spirit take these words I've spoken and grow them in your heart and then we'll have our closing psalm. Let me pray to open this time. Lord God you are beautiful you are wonderful. God forgive us when we have turned our walk of faith into a heartless religion. Forgive us for making it a routine. God if there is any part of our life that is still any part of our heart that is still not right with you then convict us of that during this time. Enlighten the eyes of our understanding. Fill us with the passion that you have in your heart so so that we can see you and know you and love you as you are deserved.