**The Congregational Church of Hollis, NH, UCC**

**Rev Bob Macfarlane, Interim Minister**

**Sermon, February 23, 2014**

**“What Is Your Passion?”**

**Ephesians 4: 1 - 16**

What is it that EXCITES you? What is it that TURNS YOU ON? What is it that GETS YOU UP in the morning? Do you say, “THIS is the day that the Lord has made!” Or do you say, “Is THIS the day that the Lord has made?” Do you say, “Let us REJOICE and be GLAD?” Or do you turn over and go back to sleep, with the covers blocking the world from your doorstep?

So we turn this morning to the question of our PASSIONS, that which turns us on, and gets us up in the morning. Perhaps you know of the story of the woman who knocks on Johnny’s bedroom door, saying “It’s time to get up and go to Church.” “But I don’t WANT to go to church this morning.” “Now don’t be like that. It’s time to get up and be off to church.” “But I DON’T WANT to go to CHURCH this morning.” “Well, maybe you don’t. But you’re the Minister and your congregation is waiting for you!”

Everyone has their moments, even ministers. The fire goes out. The desire is lost. The craving absent. Our PASSION no longer fuels our lives. If teachers knew the secret to how to light a fire under their students, the world would surely be a different place. Only God knows why one student has no ambition, while the next student is all ears, and gobbles up every bit of knowledge.

I am amazed at the dedication and passion of those winter Olympians we watch each evening in Sochi. Ice skating or skiing since they were three or four years old, for this one Olympic moment in the sun. What drives them? Why are they so PASSIONATE about what they do? Striving for excellence is a wonderful thing. It is what God intends for each of us, and while we often fall short, and only one achieves the gold medal, it is for all of us, each in our own way, to strive toward the goal of excellence, to move toward what is good. St Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians, writes while he is in prison:

“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” And Paul then goes on to list the various high callings to which he hopes his people in Ephesus might aspire: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Why aspire to such high callings? “To equip the saints,” says Paul, “for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith.” We are to grow into the likeness of Christ, joined as one body, and “knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped.”

You can read in every word which comes from Paul’s letters, the fire in his heart, and the passion in his pen, for the people he loves and serves. And as you look together as the Church in Hollis, as this one body of Christ, knit together by every ligament with which you are equipped, searching for the very best ministerial candidate available, your passion for the work of ministry and mission will pay great dividends. Why? Because ministers who are passionate about their calling, are on the other side, searching too, for congregations who are passionate about THEIR callings.

And when the passion of the pastor joins with the passion of the congregation, then great and wonderful ministry takes place. Just the opposite happens when lukewarm meets with lukewarm - a muddied mess is produced! But when fire meets fire, when hope joins with hope, when a “can do” spirit in one meets the “yes” in the other, then great things happen. And they can happen here - in this place on the Village Green at Monument Square.

Your Search Committee, in their compiling of your questionnaires recently, identified three major areas where you were strikingly similar in your passions about the life of your church: With a growing and vibrant constituency of diverse ages and interests, the congregation is passionate about its joyful children's and youth ministries, it's extensive mission outreach, and it's depth of musical talent.

Where some churches might struggle to identify ONE passion, you have already identified THREE major passions currently imbedded in your lives together as pastor and people: ministries to your children and youth, ministries to the wider church beyond your walls, and your music ministries. THESE are the strengths you already have, upon which you can now build even more. The foundation has been laid, and you are preparing now, through your Search Process, to LAUNCH into a new and vibrant future. Remember how it was Paul who also said,  ***“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”***

When you first settle into your pew, and open your morning worship bulletin, do you read the COLLECT at the top of the page? I invite you do so each Sunday, because it is a short sentence or two which often tries to set the tone for the theme of the worship for the morning. If you take you bulletin in hand right now, you’ll see that I wrote in today’s Collect, a piece which highlights for you questions to ponder about how God wishes to light a fire in our souls.

I say, “It is important that we identify what we are passionate about, and we can do so by asking ourselves three questions: “What do I sing about?” “What do I cry about?” and “What do I dream about?” First, “What do you sing about?” Do you whistle on the way to work? Is there a lilt in your step? Do you sing in minor or major keys? When our family was small and we did a Western camping trip with our boys, we would have the car windows down, and sing “Rocky Mountain High” at the top of our lungs to the CD tape.

Just this morning, word was received that the last remaining von Trapp family singer, Maria, died at age 99 in Vermont. During the War, they sang of freedom, and the beauty of loving relationships. Songs can communicate what mere words cannot. Hymns are poetic prayers. And what you sing about, speaks of your passions.

And beyond singing, what you are passionate about, can be detected in what you cry about. Have you ever thought about that? That which is deeply important to us, is what we shed tears about. The child who loses a dear pet. The mature adult who bids farewell to an aged parent. The man who never has cried in decades, wells up in tears for the flag he fought for, so many years ago. Our tears of joy when a newborn is welcomed into our arms in those first moments at birth. Tears tell many stories of what we are truly passionate about, and where our deepest joys are met by the gracious gifts of a loving God.

Finally, beyond our songs and our tears, we need to ponder the question, “What do I dream about, and what do those dreams say about our passions?”

Fantine in “Les Miserables” sings, to incredibly soaring music:

There was a time when men were kind, When their voices were soft, And their words inviting

There was a time when love was blind, And the world was a song. And the song was exciting

I dreamed a dream in time gone by. When hope was high. And life worth living

I dreamed that love would never die. I prayed that God would be forgiving

Do you, as with Fantine, dream of kindness and love, when the world is not a dirge but rather a song, dreaming of hope and of life worth living?

Our job #1, while we are in pastoral search mode, is to pray for the Search Committee itself, and to pray for the candidate out there somewhere, whom God has perhaps already identified – it’s just that the candidate and we don’t know it yet! Our job is to be encouragers of one another in this interim moment, and to trust in the process, that all will be well. And our job is to continue identifying the passions you have about your church, about your ministries, and about the deepening of your relationships with one another. If you are passionate about these things, you will be ready for tomorrow, and tomorrow will be ready for you. Amen.