

Passion!  
[Isaiah 5:1-7; 11:1-5; Mark 12:1-9](#)

Rev. Kenneth M. Locke, Interim Pastor  
St Paul UCC, New Bremen, OH  
November 19, 2023; 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

What does God want? What does God want from us as individuals? What does God want from us as a church? What does God want? Hold that thought for a minute.

In this song about the vineyard, it's striking how angry God is. God goes off on this vineyard. Clearly, God is passionate. God is passionate about what God expects from the vineyard.

If you're a gardener, this kind of passion may make sense to you. Is anyone here a gardener? Do you ever feel passionate about your garden producing for you?

My wife grows heirloom raspberries. Sometimes, after being out working on them, she'll come in and tell me about it. "I told those raspberries they better shape up. I told those raspberries I'm tired of dragging the hose around and watering their sorry selves and not getting anything for my effort." Some gardeners, at least, can get pretty passionate about their garden.

Clearly, God is passionate about what God expects from Israel. 'I freed you from slavery! I cared for you wandering in the wilderness. I gave you manna to eat and water to drink. I led you into the promised land and helped you flourish.

'And all you produce is bloodshed and sorrow: wild grapes. You should have produced good grapes of justice and righteousness. But all you have is bloodshed and sorrow.'

Let's pause a moment and look at justice and righteousness. When we think of justice we think of the lady with the scales. When we think of righteousness we think of self-righteousness.

But when God talks about justice and righteousness, God means social justice. God means right behavior towards others. When God speaks of justice and righteousness, God means giving the hungry more than enough, to eat. God means helping the homeless obtain shelter. God means everyone having access to the same medical care. God means watching out for all those so desperately dangerously trying to cross our southern border.

When a bunch of white people from Europe come to America, we build a statue and write a poem. *Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*

When a bunch of brown people from the South come to America, we build a wall. Is that God's justice?

What does God want? Clearly, God wants us to care for the powerless. And not just the minimum. God wants us to care with passion. God wants us to passionately care for the powerless.

But how? How do we do this? What does that look like?

As Christians, we know. You want to be passionate about the poor and downtrodden? Get to know Jesus. Walk in his path. Follow in his footsteps. Treat the lowly the way Jesus treats them.

Our second Old Testament lesson lays it out. Jesus is wisdom and understanding. Jesus is wise counsel and might. Living like Jesus means treating the poor rightly. It means ensuring the meek (the poor, the weak, the afflicted) receive justice.

And just in case we didn't get it, our New Testament lesson is a warning. We cannot have a lukewarm relationship with Jesus. We can accept Jesus as the Son of God and embrace him, or we can kill him: with indifference, inattention, turning a blind eye towards the poor, the weak, the afflicted.

By now, you may be wondering what all the fuss is about. Honestly, this sermon isn't covering any new ground. We know about God and the poor, about Jesus caring for the powerless, about walking in Jesus' shoes. We get that. That's why we have a Mission Team, why we have a Blessings Pantry, and why we are collecting gifts for Washington UCC. This is not new.

But this is the point I want to make. If you remember nothing else, remember this. Write it down on your bulletin, take it home, put it under your pillow and meditate on it every day. This is it: God is passionate about the poor, the powerless, the afflicted. God is passionate about caring for them. God is passionate about justice and righteousness. God is passionate about us growing good grapes.

What does God want? Remember that question? What does God want? I think we know. God wants us to practice justice and righteousness for the poor, the powerless, the afflicted.

And God wants us to do it with passion. Not lackadaisically, intermittently, sporadically, once-in-a-while. God wants us to care for the powerless with passion.

As God passionately loves us, may we, both as individuals and as a church, passionately love others in Jesus' name. Amen.