

John 4:27-42
(Psalm 36:5-9; 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1)
“A Missional Feast”

Introduction

These past two weeks, we have been treated to one example of human excellence after another: first the athletic excellence on display at the Beijing Olympics, then this past week’s remarkable speeches at the Democratic convention. I’m sure that the Republicans are hoping to match the spirit and rhetorical skill of those speeches at their convention this coming week. What makes for such excellence, whether athletic or rhetorical? It is the *passion* driving the body of the athlete and resonating in the words of the speaker, putting everything to the service of an abiding hunger to win.

When his disciples left him sitting along side Jacob’s well, Jesus was hungry and thirsty. They probably hurried to the market, quickly bought what they needed, reminding each other that the Master was waiting back at the well. “We must hurry back and see to his needs.” But when they return, they find him nourished and refreshed, his thirst quenched, his hunger satisfied. When they urge him to eat he replies, “I have food to eat that you do not know about” (4:32). They assume that someone – perhaps this woman – has drawn water for him and given him food.

In answer to their question, he gives them as deep and important a lesson as he has given the women. To her, he spoke of the great soul-defining thirst for eternal life and intimacy with God that only he could satisfy with what he called “living water.” To his disciples, he speaks of the only food that can satisfy our longing for a life of meaning and significance, a life that matters – not only for time – but for all eternity. “My food,” he says, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (4:32). This morning, I simply want us to meditate upon this single sentence recorded in verse 32. There is a progression here from the transformation of our passion and desire to the resolution to act upon that new affection God has placed within us. Then there is the movement from resolution to action, and finally to finishing the work we have been given to do.

I suspect that many of us here today have not yet moved into the life for which we were created, and others of us who began well quickly faltered and fell away because we launched out in our own natural strength without the Spirit’s transformation of our heart and soul. This greatest of all endeavors must begin with a new, God-given passion and desire, so I ask you this morning: What is the great hunger of your heart? What satisfies you most deeply? It was clear to anyone watching Michael Phelps or listening to Barack Obama how passionately each has pursued his goal. So I ask you, what is the great and compelling passion of your life? Is it something worth giving yourself to, heart and mind and strength? Or is it slowly destroying you, diverting you from great worthwhile ends in life and causing you to throw away this brief moment God has given you to do his will and to accomplish it?

Body

1. *Hungering for God's will to be done.*

Here is where it begins. But what is God's will? It is that things be here on earth as they are in heaven: that we, his people, respond to his love for us by following our Lord Jesus in loving God, loving one another, and sacrificially serving the world around us. It is seeing the sick, the poor, and the lonely, as well as the rich who live for nothing more than greater power, pleasure and prestige, and longing for them one and all to drink deeply of the water of life so that they may truly live. Do you long for that? Truly long for it so that it stirs and moves you deeply? God is on mission seeking lost and broken people, binding up families and communities and nations. And he has invited us his people to join him in this mission. In fact, he has entrusted his mission to us. We are his only plan!

2. *Resolving to do God's will.*

It's not enough to be deeply stirred with longing for God's will to be done, for broken people to find healing and wholeness. At some point, if it's real, you must look at yourself and ask, "What am *I* doing to bring such great things to pass? What have I done, what am I presently doing, to see God's Kingdom come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven?" At some point, passion must lead to serious resolution, and a plan of action. It's not enough to want to be a great swimmer: you must be willing to get up while your friends are sleeping and be in bed when they are out partying. It must be your great passion and must determine your behavior.

3. *Doing God's will.*

Of course, it finally must come to the doing. People must be loved in the concrete action of daily life. The poor must be fed, the sick cared for and healed, the lonely taken in, the lost found, the spiritually dead raised through the water of life, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. What are you doing intentionally, faithfully, to advance the kingdom of God. History is the story of God on mission reaching out, offering life to lost and broken people; and the only lives that will ultimately prove to have been worth living are those that are intentionally lived on mission with God, laboring together to see this broken world transformed. It doesn't matter what your job is, that is the very place where you are to live out your missional calling.

4. *Accomplishing God's will.*

Jesus cried out from the cross, "It is finished!" He says in our text, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish it." The word translated

“accomplish” means to finish it. God wants us to finish our work as well, not to grow weary and give up. Note the preparatory reading at the top of our bulletin. John Piper speaks about Ralph Winter: “Not only does he call retired Christians to quit throwing their lives away on the golf course when they could be giving themselves to the global cause of Christ, but he also calls students to go hard after the fullest and deepest joy of life.” You say, “But I love golf!” then you’d better begin to see it as a mission field and make it a place where you spend time with broken people who need to know the Lord, or where you take young people whom you want to spend time with so that you can help them grow in Christ.

Conclusion

Only when we begin to see life as a great missional feast spread before us, and begin to long to be on mission with the Lord of life – only then will our passions and desires begin to line up with those that lead to the only life worth living. What of you this Labor Day weekend? What are you hungering for? What is the great longing of your life? What most deeply satisfies you?

Jesus invites us to join him in this great mission that is the heart and meaning of human history, and to say with him, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish it.”

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