

Rev Ken Wratten @ St Stephen's in-the-Field, San Jose

August 14, 2016 – 13 Pentecost

Isaiah 5:1-7

Judah is God's vineyard planting; but yields only wild grapes.

Heb 11:29 – 12:2

Run the race with perseverance.

Luke 12:49-56

Why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

Passion fuels Perseverance.

Have you been watching the summer Olympics? Who has stood out for you? Katie Ledecky; won 4 gold medals, and 1 silver medal last week. In the 800 meter freestyle, she finished an amazing 12 seconds ahead of the next swimmer. I watched a short interview with her, after she had won one of those gold medals. The reporter asked her how it felt to be in this Olympic arena, with this level of competition and pressure, and to perform at that level. She answered that she was honored to compete with a world class field of swimmers; she LOVED having the chance to swim against them, and that she could count herself among them.

In that Olympic arena she felt the presence of a 'great cloud of witnesses', very much like the author of Hebrews wrote about. Ledecky felt the energy of the past generations of Olympians who sat cheering in the stands, and she felt the energy of the present generation in the other lanes of the pool; and that charge of energy gave her the perseverance to do her very best. She felt the passion that fueled her perseverance.

This is such a perfect example for our race to accomplish the goal of living a life that serves God with honor, and makes Jesus proud to be our advocate before God. Passion and perseverance, fueled by our faith in Jesus Christ.

Last week Heb 11 listed Abraham and Sarah for their strong faith in God. That commitment of faith changed where they lived, who their children were (even whether they had children), and how God used them. Heb 12 concludes that we need that same faith in God to help us persevere through changes; even through the division that our faith may cause in our lives.

Jesus said, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!" Jesus knew that in a few weeks he would be immersed (baptized) in the pain and of his Passion, and in separation from God, for a time, by taking on the sins of the whole world. Because he knew his time on earth was coming to its end, he felt an urgency to kindle this fire he had brought to earth. The fire he carried is the burning, exciting, dynamic passion for God in the lives of people: this is more than belief in God. Our decision to live for Jesus is not a decision for a lukewarm faith; This is a decision to live a passion filled life of faith. We cannot settle for less.

The commitment to live for Jesus Christ affects the way we relate to other people, even friends and family members. Our commitment to Jesus shapes our values, priorities, goals, and behavior; it makes us change old patterns of life; and these changes put pressure on even our closest relationships.

Accepting Jesus Christ into our daily walk, asking him to guide us in living out the purpose God has for us, re-indexes our priorities.

We – you and I - are part of that 'great cloud of witnesses'. We look to Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. We look to Jesus. We also see ourselves surrounded by the

faithful witnesses in this parish family; from the charter member generation, through those who bring passion to the servant ministries we are engaged in today. This is the power of Christian community. This is the power of impassioned leadership that spans generations. This is the importance of our own personal decision for Christ; to follow him - to rely on his Spirit to set our passion for God on fire.

I see passion in Chris Hall – for feeding the homeless  
 in Jim Glancey and Tony Pecora for clothing the homeless  
 In Dottie Chin – rattling the jar for Food for the Poor  
 in Frances Steitz – handing me another completed prayer shawl  
 in Tom Good –promoting the Golf Tournament

(NOT just a fund raiser)

In Bruce Ahlvin – for music that lifts all of us up to God  
 in Dan Hughes – for this facility being safe and sound  
 in Janet Thorsrud – in everything she does !!  
 And so many others of you with your passion for servant ministry.

I am honored to work with the world class cloud of witnesses for Christ who call this faith family their home. I love working with you, to bring honor to God. I love being able to count myself among you. I hold priceless our passion for servant ministry; our connection as a faith family; our always looking out for the signs of God’s Kingdom all around us.

May our Holy God guide us in the decisions we make, in the passion we hold for the race that we are running together, in the faith that we share, and in the support that we give to each other to persevere.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us...”

Amen.