



**SUNNYVALE**

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

728 W. Fremont Avenue • Sunnyvale, CA 94087

408.739.1892 • FAX: 408.739.3491

*From the Pulpit*

**Sermon: “Go Whole Hog”**

The Rev. Karin Kennedy Hejmanowski~ May 30, 2010

**Deuteronomy 6:1-9**

**Philippians 3:12-16**

I think it’s interesting to hear about people’s passions. They come in such a wide range. People are passionate about sports in general. Or some are passionate about golf. I’m amazed how many people on FB are passionate about ice hockey and the Sharks in particular. I had a supervisor who was passionate about airplanes. He wasn’t a pilot—he just loved airplanes of any kind. Some of you are passionate about food. Some about history. Some about children. Some about gardening. Others about birds. Still others about ice cream and non-cake desserts. Oh, wait. Maybe that last one is just me!

Scripture calls us to be people of passion. Perhaps that is nowhere more evident than in our scripture passage today. Hear the word of the Lord as it comes to us from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verses 1 – 9.

**READ PASSAGE**

This passage, with verse four at its core, “The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” Or elsewhere translated, “The Lord is God; the Lord is One.” Stands as the central statement and most meditated upon scripture for those who practice the Jewish faith. This passage, linked with two other passages, form the prayer that is recited at least twice daily by observant Jews.

Those first words of this passage stand as a reminder that the God whom they, and we, serve, is just one God. In the midst of polytheistic societies where a god was worshipped or prayed to or thanked for each part of life—for rain, for crops, for commerce, for family and fertility, for sun, for war, for everything imaginable and probably a few more. In the midst of this, this passage reminded the people of Israel that they were different. Not only in diet and circumcision, but in midst of the cultures that surrounded them, their faith in one God was to separate them from others. One God who was the creator and sustainer of all they had, all they needed, and all that could ever be. There was and is only one God.

And perhaps we’re not so different from the Israelites who were tempted to give their attention to other gods. Our attention and our time are vied for by so many things. It can be tempting to begin to give more attention and more of life to other things than to God. Sports or work or ministry or money or travel or . . . you fill in the blank. There are many things that seek out your attention. That seem to take on a life of their own and then demand yours as well. What that thing or those things are for you and for me may be different, but I’m guessing most of us have them. God and those who penned these words knew that was the case back then and so it continues. Our hearts can be so easily divided. So the passage reminds us that in the midst of busyness, we are to have one God. The Lord our God.

Orthodox Jews recite this prayer along with the passages that link to it at least twice a day in an effort to symbolically, if not literally, be constantly in prayer as scripture calls us to be.

But the passage goes on to tell us that we are to talk about these scriptures with our children. We are to keep the words in our hearts. We are to recite them when we lie down and when we get up. They are to be part of our constant conversation.

I have a friend whose father is Indian, from the region now known as Pakistan, and whose mother is Dutch. The mother has a very straightforward way of communicating. I was once having a conversation about who knows what and she said, “Well, you know, at your house you talk about airplanes and at our house we talk about languages.” Never mind that although my dad worked for an airline, airplanes were not necessarily the subject that made up the bulk of our conversation. But it tells me something that is true. We can tell what we value by what we spend our time talking about.

But here’s the part of the passage that gets me. Verse 5 says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” I remember back about 15 years ago really beginning to ponder this for the first time and beginning to recognize in some small ways the immensity of this command. I was serving in my first paid church position as Associate Director of Children’s Ministries in a large church—my focus was on birth to five year olds—while I was in graduate school outside of Chicago. We had broken into small groups for part of our staff meeting and we were supposed to talk something about where we were in our faith journey and what we were pondering. For some reason I had been reading this passage recently and I was truly pondering what this meant. What in

the world does it mean to love anything with all my heart, soul, and might? And how do I love God that way?

Where else in life are we given such a command or are expectations so high? And how do these high expectations meet up with our understanding of a gracious and forgiving God?

Some of us have taken marriage vows where we commit to love the other for richer for poorer, for better or for worse. And we have some assumptions and certainly hopes around that. But that still strikes me as different from what God is asking for here. What God asks for sounds so much bigger and more all inclusive in whatever way that is possible.

So I know that I don't have it all figured out. And I'm pretty sure I won't have it all figured out any time soon. What this loving God in this way looks like. But I do know that Jesus considered it the greatest commandment. We are told that in his conversation with the rich young ruler in the New Testament—the exchange about this law leads into the story about the Good Samaritan.

But instead of focusing on understanding exactly what this means in each area of life, maybe the way forward is to figure out how to do it a bit more than I am today. Last week Steve talked about Pentecost and how it is God's answer for acedia...a weariness of soul. And if indeed God has given us God's spirit as fuel for living out our faith, then what does that look like now?

Summer is just around the corner and for many of you that means the pace of life changes. For some it includes vacations and perhaps life slows a bit. If you are a

working parent, perhaps it feels faster and more challenging as you are challenged to find any rhythm of life while kludging together childcare and classes for your kids to help them grow and have fun and be safe while you work. For some the pace just stays about the same, perhaps just with a view into others' lives that do change pace.

But there's something about summer that seems to get people together more. There may be block parties or picnics or more sidewalk conversations or any number of places people gather or pause. I know some of you commit to more reading during the summer. Some of you, through Step Beyond, have committed to memorizing some scripture each week. And maybe something like that becomes one way that you love God with all your heart, mind, and strength this summer.

Or maybe you choose another way. Maybe it's living out your faith by choosing to be more present and a great presence in your neighborhood this summer.

Years ago, back when I was in college, one of my roommates who was studying to be an elementary school teacher was reading a book by Roald Dahl. I assume it was for a class, but I don't remember for sure. It was the book *Matilda*. She was sitting in the living room laughing so hard that she had tears running down her face. And a couple of times she would say, "You've got to listen to this!" So I'd come over from the kitchen and listen to her read a quote she could barely get through because of her laughter and tears and more laughter. I don't remember the others, but I've always remembered one. And I gotta be honest and say that I've never read the book and I'm told (by that college roommate) that I'm taking the quote completely out of context, but I've done that with this quote for years and I just love it. *Matilda* says, "Never do anything by halves if you want to get away

with it. Be outrageous. Go the whole hog. Make sure everything you do is so completely crazy it's unbelievable!"

I love that quote. Perhaps it's because it's not how I naturally live life. But when I think about the shema, this passage from Deuteronomy that commands us to love God with all our heart, mind, and strength, this quote quickly comes to mind.

I'm not sure what it means to live faith that way. What does it actually look like when someone puts all their energy into living life for God. I want to do that—but I don't always know how.

So when I hear the Matilda quote, it causes me to think about what area I might choose to live out that way in regards to my faith. In particular, what opportunities might this coming season afford as I and we move into the summer season.

Maybe it's loving God by being very proactive and intentional about loving your literal neighbors and serving them. Maybe it's doing that Bible study or spending time reading the Bible and doing other reading to boost and bolster your faith and your relationship with God. Maybe it's more time in prayer. Maybe it's volunteering at Bread of Life or with refugees or tutoring or any other number of service opportunities in the community.

I don't know what the area is for you, but I know that if we each chose something, there'd be a noticeable difference in our midst and also in places throughout the community. Because when you go whole hog, that's what happens. It makes a difference. Internally and beyond.

Where's the place God is calling you to take a next step. I encourage you to take some time to discern the place and then . . . go the whole hog!

Amen.

