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1/02/2018 | Monthly Topic, Vocation

## Passion that chooses us

by Angela T. Khabeb

**At some point in our lives we encounter a hobby, an interest, a cause that intrigues, inspires, or provokes us. Some passions are sparked from within, while others swirl around us, inviting and enticing us to come closer and closer until we are captured.**

According to the dictionary, passion is “a strong liking, desire for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept”.

### Passions are not one size fits all

They come in all shapes and sizes and one person's passion might be another person's bane. I have a dear friend who loves to cook. She can spend hours in the kitchen creating edible works of art – while I'm annoyed by the very thought of making dinner tonight.

Sometimes passions simply smolder unnoticed until we recognize them. Other times we stumble upon a passion – a new idea, activity, or career that we didn't know we would love.

When I was 15 years old, a classmate invited me to her church youth group. I went to the midweek service, not knowing what to expect – and can you believe it? My friend's pastor was a woman! A woman pastor! I had no idea until I heard Pastor Jeanie preach the Gospel with power and authority that I needed to be in ministry myself. That “chance” encounter changed the trajectory of my life.

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### Some passions captivate us

They call us by name and blaze brightly, lighting a clear(ish) path for us to follow. Without explanation, we simply know, "I have to do this!"

That happened to me in my twenties. One day during my morning devotions, I felt the undeniable stirring of the Holy Spirit. My heart was turned toward Mama Africa. I just had to get there! I confidently pursued that passion and before I knew it, I was an ELCA missionary in Namibia! I lived and worked in Africa for over two years.

Looking back, it seems that, to some degree, some passions are time-sensitive. When Mama Africa called my name, I was twenty-something, single, with no kids. Certainly we can serve God at any age, but global ministry is easier when you have fewer responsibilities. Now that I am

married with children and a mountain of student loans, it might be harder for me to heed the call to serve overseas. However, I trust the invitation to international ministry will reemerge once the kids are grown and I'm retired and ready for a global adventure.

The disciples were well acquainted with captivating passions. Mark's Gospel teaches us that when Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James, and John, they immediately left their fishing nets and followed him (1:17-20).

### Passions that just show up

Then there are some passions that barge into our lives violently. They show up uninvited and demand our immediate attention. You discover a lump in your breast and it's malignant. The obstetrician tells you there is no heartbeat. Your best friend dies by suicide. Then, suddenly, we find ourselves

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immersed in breast cancer awareness, pregnancy loss support groups, and mental health resources.

I remember when my doctor told me at a routine prenatal visit that our baby had died in utero. Stillbirth was inescapable. After laboring all night to bring forth a baby I knew was already dead, a passion for grief ministry was born in me. Now, many years later, it is my honor to walk with people who are struggling through stifling grief.

Years later, when our son Konami was three years old, I remember sitting in front of team of experts and hearing the words, "Your son is developmentally delayed in every area. We commonly refer to this as global delay." My husband and I sat there in a silent daze while the experts continued talking for at least twenty more minutes. Our brains simply could not process anything beyond the initial statement

Without invitation, autism was added to our family lexicon.

It is my experience that when passions are thrust upon us, we are reminded that we are part of something larger than ourselves. In retrospect, I've learned some passions are rather expensive. I'd rather be a mom who's blissfully ignorant about Autism Spectrum Disorder instead of dreading each public outing, worried about the next meltdown and ensuing spectator judgment. And please believe me, I'd rather have a twelve-year-old daughter than a burning passion for grief ministry. But ultimately, we do not choose our passions. By definition, they often choose us.

Perhaps your passion plate is full because you have chosen to fully embrace life. Or maybe you're still discovering your truth. But like most things in life, our passions have cycles. A passion may dim for a season, but they never die. And so—let us remain open to the breath of new life. The Spirit blows where she chooses and she may have plans to blow a small spark in our souls into a bright and consuming passion.

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01/04/2018 | Faith Reflections, Monthly Topic

## Discovering your passion

by Lee Ann Pomrenke

**Passion. We know when we have it, and we know when we don't. And we know it's not something we can muster up when it just isn't there.**

During the cold, long nights of winter, after the excitement of Christmas and Epiphany has passed, our lack of passion can be all too obvious. We all go through times when we are stuck in a rut, merely going along with the status quo, possibly wanting to make a difference but with no idea where to start or motivation to think about it.

Other times we're not looking for anything in particular, but somehow something chooses us. Stumbling into passion that way feels like "eureka!" Suddenly we find the spark that was inside us all along, now freed to change the world.

### Have your gifts chosen you?

Maybe the moment and your gifts have come together to stir up your passion. Or you and those you love have been seeking out new passions, new ways to make a difference or movements that truly move you. In any event, consider the biblical story of Esther, a Jewish woman who lived in Persia long ago.

The first queen angered the king by refusing to show up when he called her. The king's advisers suggested he have the most beautiful virgins from the entire kingdom brought to him so he could choose another, more biddable queen.

Esther was among the young women called to the palace, and her cousin and foster father, Mordecai, instructed her to keep her Jewish identity secret. She was taken into the harem and we are told she

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blended in well, always taking the advice of those in charge. She pleased the king and he made her the new queen.

Then there came a threat to the Jews in the empire. Was Esther starting to feel restless, maybe ready for a change, perhaps looking for a cause to champion? Probably not – but her identity and the moment came together to spark her passion.

The king's closest adviser, Haman, resented Mordecai and began to plot against all the Jews of Persia. Mordecai told Queen Esther of the threat, but she refused his plea. No one could approach the king without being summoned, she told him, not even the queen. Even to try could mean her death.

But Mordecai told her, "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this" (Esther 4:13-14).

The Jewish people were facing a mortal threat, and as Mordecai pointed out, Esther was in a unique position to persuade the king to have mercy on her people. And so she did – putting her own clever twist into the tale.

### **It's personal**

Esther changed from a docile follower of everybody's advice to a passionate advocate for her people. In the story, the change came from one conversation with her foster father Mordecai. But we don't often become instantly passionate about something. First, we have to give ourselves some space to see how it goes, whom it connects us to, and how we feel about it. We have to trust our instincts and recognize our natural strengths and weaknesses. But the voices of people we trust – as Esther trusted Mordecai – can also play a major role.

### **Self-interest or selfishness?**

When a community organizer first talked to me about self-interest, it sounded selfish. But it is actually the opposite: Knowing how I am affected by and therefore personally invested in something is not



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just about me. When we can identify how an issue affects us directly, it is easier to stay committed to the cause if that becomes inconvenient or worse. Also, telling our stories is the most genuine, non-threatening way to share our passion.

Would Esther have stood up to the king if Mordecai had not reminded her that Haman's plan to murder the Jews of Persia meant that her own life was in danger anyway? His words reminded her that although she was not the only one who could act for God's justice, there was a lot hanging on her actions. Plus, Esther was in a unique position. No one else had the access to the king that she had.

When we consider the causes we are going to pour ourselves into, taking inventory of our own situation first adds to our effectiveness. Just as Esther considered what she, and only she, could do to save her people, we can consider our own power and access as well.

Our self-interest may begin with people and places we can name, but the passions that are most worth pursuing have a larger impact as well. Esther gathered her courage and spoke up for the sake of the Jewish people scattered across all the provinces her king ruled, and thus she became an instrument of God's action. Then she discovered that she was not alone; all the Jewish people throughout the kingdom rose up to defend themselves against Haman's evil plan.

### **Timing is everything**

The question "What if . . . for such a time as this?" is so powerful precisely because it is a question. We don't know until we act what our effect might be, but we do know that action is urgent.

Timing is definitely the domain of the Holy Spirit, who blows where she will, spinning us around like a spiral of leaves on a windy day. When the spirit of change in its disguise as restlessness starts blowing through us and then through entire groups of people until we can hear each other being moved, the Holy Spirit has arrived. The time has come to act – and we'll find we are not alone. We were made for such a time as this.

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### Discussion questions:

1. About what issues are you most passionate? Where is your self-interest in this issue?
2. Can you point to the Holy Spirit moving you to act on this passion through either self-interest, relationships or timing? How does your passion affect others?
3. Sometimes what we are most passionate about just doesn't pay the bills. Yet there are always ways to act on that passion, even at unrelated work, school, or time at home. How might you work your passion into everyday life?

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