

Movie Message: Fever Pitch
Colossians 1:15-20
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St. John United Methodist Church
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What in this life do you feel passionate about? What is it that really gets your juices flowing, that makes the hair on your arms tingle with excitement? One of my passions is the creative process that comes with building something. I've designed and built hundreds of hardwood projects including beds and tables. I've built three camp trailers. I enjoy this process so much that I have even worked on designs in my sleep!

Our movie today is Fever Pitch. It is about Ben, a Boston math teacher, who is passionate about the Red Sox. His uncle took him to a game when he was a kid and that's when the love affair started. In this scene we get a glimpse of Ben's apartment and all of the Red Sox paraphernalia. Watch for him making the sign of the cross in front of a photo of a player.

Video Clip 23:23 – 24:17

Have you ever known someone who did not seem to have any passions? Didn't have any favorite restaurants, didn't want to do much, or could not pick out a movie to watch? How about buying gifts for someone? It can be quite a challenge to shop for a loved one at Christmas when they don't seem to want much. I remember one person for whom family would always buy them Peanuts stuff. Over the years he had been given hundreds of Charlie Brown and Snoopy figurines. He once confided that he really didn't care all that much for all this stuff. He just wanted to make people happy to buy them for him!

Some passions come and go. Others last for a lifetime. Sometimes they come into conflict with each other. Ben's passion for the Red Sox slams head on into his love for Lindsay, his new girlfriend. Lindsay wants to know when Ben takes his spring break from teaching because she wants him to come up and meet her parents. Ben explains that he has a "previous commitment." Every year he and his friends go down to Florida for spring break.

He tries to explain his feelings with Lindsay, "Sometimes I like to be a part of something bigger than me, than I...It's good for your soul to be in the middle of something you can't control."

Lindsay smiles and calls Ben a "romantic." With the Sox as his team he has learned "to love in the best and worst circumstances." Ben, surprised to find someone who "gets him," agrees with Lindsay, so much so that he gets down on one knee, and asks her...to come with him to Opening Day. She says, "yes."

Video clip 26:54 – 30:50

Ben is sold out to the Red Sox. Lindsay finds his passion romantic. Most people find his obsession a little creepy. But Ben merely represents the way many people would like to feel about something, anything. They want to be a part of something greater than themselves.

Theologian Rudolf Otto refers to this sensation as "creature feeling" -- the frightening but fascinating feeling of smallness we experience when we are in the presence of something transcendent. Human beings are hard-wired by God to have these feelings, to seek out opportunities for worship. For some it can be worshipping in a grand cathedral. For others it is a mountain vista at sunset. For Ben it was walking into Fenway Park.

People who claim to have no belief or faith in God find themselves drawn to places, objects, or other people on which to lavish their devotion. All you have to do to see it is to attend a rock concert, a sporting event, or watch fans at the red-carpet entrance to the Academy Awards. What makes the worship possible is the community it represents. Ben talks about the sights and sounds of baseball as if it were a church. People get fanatical about a sports team or skydiving or motorcycling because of the sense of belonging it gives them.

In our scripture from Colossians Paul writes about Christ being head of the Church so that "he might come to have first place in everything." (v. 18) This leads us to the faith community. Do you feel a personal sense of community in your church?

In Alaska and the west in general there is a much higher percentage of unchurched people than the Midwest or the south. In our state only about 34% of the population have ties to a church or synagogue.¹ What this says to me is that people are finding their need to belong at their local bar or ski club or hiking group instead of the church. Many of them believe in God but they just don't feel the need to belong to a church.

The next scene is Ben taking Lindsay to opening day. Lindsay gets a glimpse into the sense of community Ben and the other Red Sox fans feel.

Video Clip 38:17 – 40:12

If you were to make a list of your primary communities where would your church be on that list? More importantly, where would your relationship with God be on that list? Scripture makes it clear that God wants to be first in your life. Part of the challenge of the Christ-centered life is sometimes when we make God first, we also get our passions. Being a Christian doesn't mean we have to give up the wild and adventurous side of life. But there are times when we have to choose between God and competing passions. Ben was faced with the choice between going to Paris with Lindsay or an important baseball game.

Video Clip 58:28 – 59:47

One of the realities of our modern society is that our choices are expanding, at least for those in the middle and upper classes. For example, you need a vehicle. Do you know that you have over 500 choices of which type of car or truck to buy? I went to Home Depot last week to buy some brown paint. I just wanted brown paint. Did they have brown paint? No! They had swiss chocolate brown and tinder box brown and copper brown. With so many choices I walked out knowing that I would likely choose the color Kim didn't like.

With so many choices we are forced to spend lots of time trying to decide which product is the best buy. Over the course of our lifetimes we will spend 9% of our time just deciding which products to buy. 9%!

¹ <http://www.bestplaces.net/State/Alaska.aspx> (retrieved Aug. 7, 2008)

One of the consequences of having more choices is that we are less likely to make commitments. We receive an invitation to an event but hesitate to commit. Why? Because something else may come up we would like better. I call this "The Maybe Syndrome." Would you like to come to our home for dinner next Thursday? Well, maybe. I have tickets to the big game. Would you like to go with me? Hmmm. Maybe. We don't want to make a commitment because then we would be obligated to honor it.

Maybe, just maybe this is what we do with God. God invites us to be in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We would never answer with a blatant no. In our hymns and prayers and vows in church we say yes, but in our hearts it is often a maybe.

After a bunch of maybe's Ben has finally decided to choose Lindsay over the Red Sox. He is at the game about to sign a contract to sell his two season tickets for \$125,000. When Lindsay learns of this she tries to stop him. Desperate she runs onto the field to get to him.

Video Clip 1:31:08 – 1:34:10

People have a built in need to experience something bigger than ourselves. This need was created by God to be filled by God. But we keep saying maybe to God while we say yes to the Red Sox or whatever passion consumes our lives. No matter what our passion it is God that we seek. It is God we desire to worship. If people do not find it in the church, they will look for it elsewhere, and counterfeits abound. The Church is the custodian of the ultimate "greater than myself" experience. We need to continue to invite people to choose this ultimate experience and find all the passions of this life flowing out of this primary and number one relationship.

There's an old story of two paddleboats traveling down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. As they traveled side by side, sailors from one vessel made a few remarks about the snail's pace of the other. Words were exchanged. Challenges were made. And the race began. Competition became vicious as the two boats roared through the Deep South.

One boat began falling behind. Not enough fuel. There had been plenty of coal for the trip, but not enough for a race. As the boat dropped back, an enterprising young sailor took some of the ship's cargo and tossed it into the ovens. When the sailors saw that the supplies burned as well as the coal, they fueled their boat with the material they had been assigned to transport. They ended up winning the race, but burned their cargo.²

As we sail through life entrusted with precious cargo we will be tempted to give in to distractions that take us away from our true goal. It isn't to win a competition. Our true goal is to worship God, experience the community of faith, and to be good stewards of all the gifts of life and love we have been given.

² Max Lucado, *In the Eye of the Storm*, Word Publishing, 1991, pp. 97-98.