

Pastor's Message – 6/25/23  
Matthew 10:24-39

Raindrops and roses and whiskers on kittens.  
Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens.  
Brown paper packages tied up with strings.  
These are a few of my favorite things.

Cream-colored ponies and crisp apple strudels.  
Doorbells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles.  
Wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings.  
These are a few of my favorite things.

Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes.  
Snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes.  
Silver-white winters that melt into spring.  
These are a few of my favorite things.

I understand that Julie Andrews is no longer singing publicly, so I couldn't get her to come in and sing the song, but in the Sound of Music, her character sings about her favorite things. All of us have our "favorite things:" "those things that make life worth living." There is a worksheet in your bulletin today and I would invite you to take a minute or two and list three things that are **your** "favorite things:" "those things that make life worth living."

There is a Bible passage suggested for Committal/Graveside services in our United Methodist Book of Worship from the gospel of John. I've read it many times over the years and each time, it takes me aback and makes me think and makes me uncomfortable. "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." That's from John 12:25. We heard Matthew's version today, "If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it." (10:39)

What does it mean to hate one's life in this world? The word, "hate," might be misinterpreted. I've learned that the word "hate" in that Bible passage means more the idea of prioritizing the things of this world instead of the things of God and life in God.

I believe that every person has their own things they consider values—things or activities that they spend time and energy and resources on. One of my favorite hymns is “Count Your Blessings” and that hymn can help us consider the things we consider valuable, regain perspective, and remember the little things that put a spring in our step and remind us of God’s loving presence.

Those are about us; those are personal, but it may also be helpful to take time to list the “favorite things” about your Church. Be specific and name names. A true favorite deserves to be singled out and held up for recognition. Perhaps it’s the music. Perhaps it’s the fellowship. Perhaps it’s the opportunity to hear God’s Word preached and read. Perhaps it is the routine of taking regular time to praise God and give thanks for who He is and for what He has done in your life or in the life of your family or community. Perhaps it is the unexpected ways in which God becomes real in worship.

But even that kind of a list is too small. Take time now to expand your focus, to go beyond the four walls of the church and consider three of your “favorite things” about God, about the Holy Spirit, about the church (the larger church with a lower-case “C”). Each time we consider, it may get easier, or it may get harder. You may find that you can’t limit your “favorite things” to three or maybe just one thing jumps out at you.

Finally, let’s get to the heart of all this “favoritism” and consider what is your favorite thing about being a Christian. If you could stand on your rooftop and shout out just one message about your Christian faith, what would it be? What is the “good news” you would want to share?

Our entire Bible reading from Matthew 10 today calls us to reflect on “our favorite things:” those things that are most precious and valuable and important to us. Jesus calls us to reflect on the extent we value our life on earth versus our life in heaven. He calls us to reflect on the importance of our earthly family versus our spiritual family. He calls us to reflect on who or what we put first in our lives. And He expects us to make our priorities public – to shout from the rooftops for all to hear!

And then He states that “Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.” (10:32)

We have a God who notices people and who keeps his eye on people; “What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.” We are all among God's favorite things.

We have a people-noticing God; it's time now to have a people who notice, acknowledge, and talk about the God-things we see in everyday life. We have a church-noticing God; it's time now to have a God-noticing church.

Since we are among God's favorite things, we can take heart and be confident of God's love and care. Realizing and experiencing God's love, we have the opportunity to share what we know – to tell and show the good news in our lives, that each of us are one of God's favorites and so are they. We have the chance to live our faith and share the favorite things of our faith with others.