

Enneagram: Enthusiast

A Sermon for University Congregational Church

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Contemporary Word

“Faith is an excitement and an enthusiasm: it is a condition of intellectual magnificence to which we must cling as to a treasure, and not squander on our way through life in the small coin of empty words, or in exact and priggish argument.” --George Sand

Traditional Word

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Philippians 4:6 NRSV

Enneagram: Enthusiast

I had planned this big reveal for my Enneagram type. I'd been careful not to tell too many folks what I am and in my previous sermon on Type 4, the Individualist, I took great pains to make sure I didn't accidentally spill the beans and reveal my type. Then last week, Robin outed me as a seven....an Enthusiast—and no one batted an eye. You were all like, yeah, uh, what's the surprise. Of course, Paul's an Enthusiast...so, all of that build up to my big reveal and everyone is like...so what? But—I'm still enthused about telling you all that I'm an enthusiast. There I got say it! I'm an enthusiast. Yay! Enthusiasts are the Busy, Variety-Seeking Type: we're spontaneous, versatile, acquisitive, and, yes, sometimes scattered. One of the downsides to studying the Enneagram is that you have to take the good with the bad. You get to look at all of the neat potential positives attributes your type possesses and then you read all of the potential

negatives attributes and you're like....um, manic? Me? Well...sometimes? Failure to recognize pain or wrongness in a situation? Um...maybe? WE get these wonderfully convoluted and complex personalities and try to define them with one or two words. It's a trap to think we can fit anyone into just one category and keep them there forever. I might exhibit all of the positive traits of my type on one day and on the next I might exhibit all of the negative traits. We're humans! We're complex.

So I have a long history with my friends and family of using my positive traits of enthusiasm and what my friend Shanna calls "hype-ability" to get everyone to go along with something. There are many examples of my tribe sitting through a mediocre movie because I bought into the "hype" of the previews. I suppose "7's" would make good salespeople, except we're lousy at the follow-through of the close. We can get things started, but by the time the daily grind comes along, we're already off on our next adventure. We can't be bothered with the day-to-day predictability of life because we're too busy checking out this new vista over here....something shiny—that is always pulling our attention away from matters at hand. Healthy "7's", though, know this about themselves and use a variety of tools to help us stay focused and on task. I have not only maintained a "Franklin Planner"—a really neat type of day planner—for my entire professional life, I also utilize Google to a good extent. The rule for me and those in my life is: If it's not on my calendar (either the old-fashioned paper and pen day planner or the fancy-schmancy Google type)...if it's not in my calendar, odds are good it's not going to happen. And as Robin will attest, I also utilize note-cards and sticky notes to an almost absurd extent...all of these tricks and tools are used to keep my "7" enthusiastic mind anchored to the realities of my life that goes on around me—regardless of the fact that I'd rather be off pursuing the next shiny object. Whatever that may be.

Perhaps this is why my time on my bicycle has become so sacred and important to me. It always has held an important place in my life, but lately it has become an almost “holy” thing for me. I get on my bike and for the next period of time, however long or short it may be, I am free to chase the “shiny thing”. While I often have a pre-planned route, I don’t always take the same ones and my very best rides are the ones where I end up somewhere in town where I’ve never been before—exploring a back street or a neighborhood of houses and parks that I’ve never experienced. My mind is then connected to God in a different way than it usually is during the day. I see things differently. I notice a peculiar rhythm to the world. I feel like I’m in the thrall of life, of something bigger than me, and that I’m a useful part of whatever this energy is. In fact, the word enthusiasm is literally drawn from that idea-- En-theos: To be in the thrall of a god. How can that ever be a bad thing?

Sevens are extroverted, optimistic, versatile, and spontaneous. We’re playful, high-spirited, and practical, but we can also misapply our many talents, becoming over-extended, scattered, and undisciplined. I’ve had many of you come to my office to discuss this very thing. Some of you are concerned that I’m over-extended—but I assure you I am not! Sevens typically have problems with impatience and impulsiveness. At our best we focus our talents on worthwhile goals, becoming appreciative, joyous, and satisfied with key motivations of wanting to maintain our freedom and happiness. We don’t want to miss out on anything that life has to offer, we crave the need to keep ourselves excited and occupied which conversely means that we often seek ways to avoid unpleasant and painful things. And this is the “7’s” basic fear—of being deprived of something, of missing-out on life—and of being in pain, whether physical, spiritual or psychological. We avoid pain at all costs.

Also on the negative side of things, “7’s” have the potential to seem scattered because we tend to be pretty practical and engaged in a multitude of projects at any given time. A 7’s thinking is *anticipatory*: we foresee events and generate ideas “on the fly,” favoring activities that stimulate our minds—which in turn generates more things to do and think about. How’s that for a conundrum! Our minds move rapidly from one idea to the next, making Sevens good at brainstorming and synthesizing information. We are exhilarated by the rush of ideas and by the pleasure of being spontaneous, preferring broad overviews and the excitement of the initial stages of the creative process as opposed to probing a single topic in depth. However; we do not feel that we always know what to do or how to make choices that will be beneficial to ourselves and others. Sevens cope with this anxiety in two ways. First, we try to keep their minds busy all of the time. As long as Sevens can keep their minds occupied, especially with projects and positive ideas for the future, we can, to some extent, keep anxiety and negative feelings out of our conscious awareness. Likewise, since our thinking is stimulated by activity, Sevens are compelled to stay on the go, moving from one experience to the next, searching for more stimulation. And as we speed up our pursuit of whatever seems to offer freedom and satisfaction, we often tend to make worse choices, and we might become less able to be satisfied because everything is experienced indirectly, through that dense filter of our fast-paced mental activity. The result may be that some Sevens end up anxious, frustrated, and enraged, with fewer resources available to us physically, emotionally, or financially. We may end up ruining our health, our relationships, and our finances in our search for happiness.

All of that and yet we somehow manage to remain upbeat and positive. Sevens are extremely optimistic people—exuberant and enthusiastic. We are endowed with abundant vitality and a desire to fully participate in their lives each day. We are naturally cheerful and good humored,

not usually taking ourselves too seriously, or anything else for that matter. As we have seen, the basic desire of Sevens is to be satisfied, happy, and fulfilled, and when “7’s” are balanced within themselves, their joy and enthusiasm for life naturally affects everyone around them. They remind us of the pure pleasure of existence—the greatest gift of all.

Of current living “7’s”, one of the most well-known is his Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso. He always describes himself as a simple Buddhist monk and yet he is the spiritual leader of Tibet and an entire school of Buddhism. The Dalai Lamas are believed to be manifestations of Buddhist “saints”—Bodhisattvas, particularly, in the Dalai Lama’s case, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Bodhisattvas are humans who have attained Buddhahood, but instead of ascending towards Nirvana on their deaths, their spirits instead stay behind to help others to attain Buddhahood. They do this for the benefit of all sentient beings, who have vowed to be reborn in the world to help humanity.

In 1950, after China's invasion of Tibet, the Dalai Lama was called upon to assume full political power. In 1959, following the brutal suppression of the Tibetan national uprising in Lhasa by Chinese troops, the Dalai Lama was forced to escape into exile. Since then he has been living in Dharamsala, in northern India. There can be no denying that the Dalai Lama is a man of peace. In 1989 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent struggle for the liberation of Tibet. He has consistently advocated policies of non-violence, even in the face of extreme aggression. The Dalai Lama has held discussions with heads of different religions and participated in many events promoting inter-religious harmony and understanding.

Since the mid-1980s, the Dalai Lama has engaged in a dialogue with modern scientists, mainly in the fields of psychology, neurobiology, quantum physics and cosmology. This has led to a historic collaboration between Buddhist monks and world-renowned scientists in trying to help

individuals achieve peace of mind. It has also resulted in the addition of modern science to the traditional curriculum of Tibetan monastic institutions re-established in exile. In fact, the importance of science to the study of Buddhism cannot be understated. He once answered a question, concerning blind dogmatic faith and adherence to ancient scripture with these words: ““If scientific analysis were conclusively to demonstrate certain claims in Buddhism to be false, then we must accept the findings of science and abandon those claims.” There’s a practical seven for you!

A “7” with the tools and training to assist them with focus can do great things indeed. Imagine what our world would have been had the Dalai Lama not had the entire structure of Tibetan Buddhism in place to assist him in his spiritual journey? In our own Christian tradition we find a very famous Seven in the life of Barnabas.

Saint Barnabas was born in Cyprus and died in Salamis in the 1st century. The Acts of the Apostles describes Barnabas as 'a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith' (*Acts 6:24*). His Jewish parents called him Joseph, but when he sold all his goods and gave the money to the apostles in Jerusalem, they gave him a new name: Barnabas, which means 'son of consolation' or 'man of encouragement.' Barnabas was of the Tribe of Levi and lived with the earliest Christians in Jerusalem. Barnabas possessed exceptional spiritual qualities. In particular, he believed that his life was under the control of the Spirit, and Barnabas had an unshakable confidence in God. Barnabas was enthusiastic about the new Christ Movement that had begun and was one of the very first to welcome Paul back to Jerusalem on his return. Tradition says that Barnabas preached in Alexandria and Rome, and was stoned to death at Salamis about 61 AD. He is considered the founder of the Cypriot Church and his feast day is my birthday and now the anniversary of my ordination, June 11.

So two enthusiasts, dedicated to the spiritual life: The Dalai Lama and Barnabas—and I suppose now, me. Three humans enthralled by God—enthusiasts wake up each morning with our eyes facing the future—ready for what is to happen next—and looking for opportunities to maybe convince others in our sphere of influence that life is good. That even though things don't always appear to be good, life is, at its core, a good thing. And we are here for but a brief time. And why not use that time to be excited about life---not sad about it. Never anxious. Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians: “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Don't worry about anything. Do you think the Dalai Lama wakes up any morning anxious? No, he wakes up ready for the day—looking forward—anticipating the challenges that lie ahead. And brilliant French author George Sand write this about enthusiasm: ““Faith is an excitement and an enthusiasm: it is a condition of intellectual magnificence to which we must cling as to a treasure, and not squander on our way through life in the small coin of empty words, or in exact and priggish argument.” Both of these quotes are in your bulletins and I encourage you to read them a couple of times this week: Do not be anxious and faith is an excitement and an enthusiasm. Powerful words to help you through the coming days—devour them and make them part of your DNA.

One of the gifts of being an enthusiast is that I awaken each morning ready for the day. I look forward to my drive to this place—because this community is making a difference in the world. Through our work with the Hygiene Pantry we give people hope. Through our College Music Student Scholarship program, we give students hope. Through our work with the community of Chacraseca in Nicaragua, we give Central American nations hope. Every time you walk through that door and help build our community, you give me hope. Every dollar you give to sustain this work gives us all hope. Every act of kindness and love that you perpetuate

throughout the week gives people hope. Jesus didn't come to the world to maintain the status quo—he came to shake things up—to wake us out of our complacency—and to give us hope.

How can you NOT be enthusiastic about? Get enthused about life—give the world hope. AMEN

Please stand as you are able and sing our benediction hymn.

Resources Used:

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