

God as Intimate Lover

A sermon preached by the Rev. Roger Scott Powers
at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Albuquerque,
on Sunday, August 29, 2021.

Song of Solomon 2:8-13

We rarely hear passages from The Song of Solomon read in worship, much less preached upon. Indeed, this is the only Sunday in the entire three-year cycle of lectionary readings from the Bible that there is an appointed reading from The Song of Solomon. So, I didn't want to miss the opportunity to include it in today's service.

The Song of Solomon, which is also known as the Song of Songs, is one of the most beautiful love poems ever written. It is a dialogue between two young, unmarried lovers. Its language is intimate, personal, sensual.

While it is attributed to King Solomon, it was probably written several centuries after Solomon, and ascribed to him because of his reputation as a poet, sage, and lover.

The title "Song of Songs" can be interpreted to mean "a song comprised of songs" or as a superlative -- "the most excellent of songs." It resembles the love poetry of ancient Egypt, which was sung as entertainment by professional singers at banquets.

Of all the books in the Old Testament, the Song of Songs is unusual in that it does not concern itself with the external, political life of the nation of Israel. It doesn't look at palace intrigue, temple politics, prophetic critiques, or international conflict, as does so much of the Old Testament. Instead, it introduces us to the non-public world of ancient Israel, as it focuses on the private world of two young people in love.

It is unusual in two other respects as well. It is one of only two books in the Bible that never mentions God. The other book that

shares this distinction is Esther. The Song of Songs is also the only book in the Bible in which the female voice is predominant. All the other books in the Bible are written in the male voice.

You have to wonder how this book -- a secular love poem that favors a women's point of view and never mentions God -- ever made it into the Bible at all!

Well, it seems that over many years of use, the interpretation of the poem evolved and came to be regarded as an allegory. In the Jewish tradition, it is considered an allegory about God's love for Israel. In the Christian tradition, it is considered an allegory about God's love for the Church or for the individual soul. Thus reinterpreted as a religious document, it remains part of the Bible today.

Reading the Song of Songs as an allegory invites us to consider God as an intimate lover and our relationship to God as a passionate love affair. God longs to be in intimate relationship with each of us. God yearns to be close to us. In the excerpt read this morning, God is portrayed as "a gazelle or a young stag" leaping and bounding toward us with exuberant energy and enthusiasm. God comes to us. God wants to see us, to be with us. "Look, there [God] stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice." And then God speaks, the beloved voice of God calls out to each one of us: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past the rain is over and gone." Spring is in the air! "The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." God calls to us as a lover calls to his beloved. God calls to us and bids us come away . . . to be together.

In human relationships, when we love others in a special way, we want to spend time with them. We are attracted to their beauty. We praise them for their many good qualities and for their accomplishments. We are attentive to them and we listen to

them. When we are apart from our loved ones, we miss them. We think about them often and long to hear from them -- to receive a letter, an email, a phone call, a text message. We want to know what they're doing, and we want to share what we're doing with them. We find it difficult to be apart from them for extended periods of time. We can't wait to be reunited -- to be together with them again.

The same could be said about our relationship with God. If we really love God, we will want to spend time in God's presence. We will want to spend time each day with God in prayer and contemplation.

If we really love God, we will be attracted to the beauty of God's Creation all around us. We will value it and care for it. We will want to give God thanks and praise for the gift of life and for all the blessings we have received. We will want to worship God in awe and wonder for creating us, sustaining us, and redeeming us.

If we really love God, we will want to be attentive to God's voice. We will want to read the Bible regularly and listen intently for God's word to us. If we really love God, we will want to discern what God is doing in the world and we will want to share what we are doing with God. When God feels far away from us, we will long for God's closeness to return.

The 14th century English mystic Julian of Norwich pointed to the goodness and love of God in her book *Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love*. Published around the year 1393, it is believed to be the first book written by a woman in the English language. In it, she wrote: "We are so preciously loved by God that we cannot even comprehend it. No created being can ever know how much and how sweetly and tenderly God loves them. It is only with the help of his grace that we are able to persevere in spiritual contemplation with endless wonder at his high, surpassing, immeasurable love which our Lord in his goodness has for us. Therefore we may ask from our Lover to have all of him that we desire. For it is our nature to long for him, and it is his nature to long for us. In this life we can never stop loving him."

To have a love affair with God is to feel God's overwhelming love for us and to want to love God in return with all of our being. As the First Letter of John puts it, "we love because God first loved us." To have a love affair with God is to have an intense desire to be in intimate relationship with God.

As Christians, we know that God loves us, because God revealed it to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. "God's love was revealed among us in this way:" First John tells us, "God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him." It is through Christ that we see God's love for us most clearly. It is through Christ that we see God's love lived out concretely in the world.

So, let us give thanks for God's unconditional love for us, and let us commit ourselves to loving God in return -- with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds, and with all our strength. May it be so. Amen.