

Pentecost 14B - Song of Songs 2.8-13 - Proper 22

It is rare that a passage from The Song of Songs is included in the lectionary. In fact it's so rare that this is the only reading from this book of beautiful, evocative love poetry that appears in the three year cycle of the Sunday lectionary. After the time we've been through with the pandemic and all the terrible news stories of the recent weeks from an earthquake in Haiti, to a volcano eruption in St. Vincent, a heat dome in western Canada, forest fires everywhere and now the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban. It's time for some love. It's time to hear about love to comfort our weary souls and hearts. This passage from the Song of Songs is so romantic and gentle. It is a nice balm to soothe us during the challenging times we live in. I won't call it a distraction. I'll go with balm, something that comforts us and heals us. For many years Song of Songs was interpreted as an allegory or a metaphor describing the love relationship between God and God's people or later on about the love between Jesus and His Church. Those things can all be true, but for today let's view it from the perspective of, this passage at least, being a celebration of human love and the quality of love.

It's nice to hear more about love and this passage is told to us through a woman's voice and perspective. That is unusual. That is refreshing. There aren't many passages in the Bible that are told through the prism of a

woman's narrative experience. More often we hear of a woman's participation in the scriptures as told through a man's voice. It is not the same. In the times we live in now we know how important it is for people to tell their own stories in their own voice. Whether we are talking about women, indigenous voices or minority voices, everyone has a unique voice and perspective that we can all learn from. In this passage the woman's point of view predominates. She claims her voice.

As you can imagine, this reading often appears at weddings. No wonder, since the female voice who speaks throughout these verses refers to her 'beloved'. She speaks from her room about how her beloved can leap upon mountains and bound over hills to come to her. He's described as being like a gazelle or a young stag; animals of power, strength and beauty. He can overcome any obstacle to be near her. He's looking at her from behind the wall around her dwelling place and gazing up towards her windows and through the lattice. She tells us that her beloved invites her to come away with him. They were apart from each other and now they are together and will go away together...a new season in their relationship is about to begin. We are invited by this passage to consider the holiness of embodied love.

The passage speaks about the change of seasons. The winter is past, the rain is over and gone. It is spring and sunshine. Flowers blossom and appear

on the earth. The time of singing has come again. The silence of winter has moved aside for the singing of creation. It sounds as if this line refers not just to the singing of human voices, but more like the voices of birds singing. The fig tree has figs appear on its branches and vines are in blossom. The fragrance of fruits and blossoms from the bounty of the earth fills the air. It speaks of a world of grace. It speaks to the land and all her creatures and plants coming into new life after a long winter hibernation. No matter how trying our winters may be, spring always follows. Winter always makes way for spring. It is a garden of delights. It is a celebration of God's incredible creative power in nature. It also harkens back to God's creation of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden.

This passage is a metaphor recognizing the seasons of life. It is a blessing to have love throughout all our different seasons of life. Love is profound and deeply connected with all reality. Love can carry us through the joys and challenges of life. As St. Paul says, and I paraphrase here, without love we are nothing. This passage speaks of a mutual love, a consensual love. A partnership. A covenant of love. A love where each partner helps and uplifts the other. It isn't one-sided where one person does all the giving and the other merely receives. Both sides of the covenant give and receive love. The love we humans share for one another whether romantic, familial, or platonic is God's

intended gift and joy for us. It is a treasure. It is transformative which is why God gives it to us. God through the gift of love hopes to transform our lives and our beings into kind, caring compassionate and forgiving people. Love transforms relationships, nature and creation.

We are on the cusp of the Season of Creation which begins on 1 September and ends on 4 October. It's a season where we reflect on ways we can be better stewards of creation. It's a time to reflect on our relationship with the earth. A time when we can engage with what God has made. We learn more about our role in protecting the land, being kinder and gentler with it...finding better ways to treat it so it will be passed on to future generations in better shape than we found it. It's a season where we can show our love for the natural world and her resources that sustain our lives on the earth that God made.

Here at Grace we have solar panels on the roof of our Parish Hall that generate power from the sun, a renewable resource. We recycle and compost as much waste as we can. This year we have gotten rid of all single use plastic in our kitchen and are introducing a ban on the use of bottled water on our premises. These are some simple ways we can reduce harm to our environment. We'll hear, throughout the season, more ways we can love and honour God's earth. We can love the earth in many ways that are more

sustainable. By loving the earth we make it a better place to live in for everyone in the world not just ourselves. Creation brings us joy and peace. That makes it worthwhile of our love. We can revel in that feeling for a season.

I'd like to think that every season in the church is a season of love. The liturgical seasons and readings help define for us how God loves us and how much God loves us. We are reminded that love is a gift of God. We are called to love God. We are called to love each other and to have love for each other. This passage calls us to regale in the simple things of life and love. To not forget to have love in our lives and celebrate it. Love allows us to live fuller lives. As the late German theologian Dorothee Soelle said about this reading, "In this passage, nature, animals, men and women partake of the joy, the abundance, the fullness of life." Love, as it's meant to be, brings out the best in us and allows us to become our true selves. Love gives us security and confidence to be our best selves and to be motivated to give that same kind of love to the people in our lives whether they are with us for one season or for all of them and everything in between. Love is a wonderful thing. Love makes us all better people. Love makes a better world. Thanks be to the God of love.

Preached by The Rev. Karine Snowdon on 29 August 2021, Grace Church Milton.