

August 29, 2021

“Be-love(d)”

Scripture Reading

Song of Songs 2:8-13

The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. 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.

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” He said to them, “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.’ You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.” Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.” For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come.

Sermon

“Be-love(d)”

The Song of Songs is one of the most controversial books pretty much in the history of our collective scripture. First, it almost didn't make it into the Jewish canon. If the Hebrew scholars at the time didn't think that it was actually written by King Solomon himself, it wouldn't have been included.

Then it was argued over again when the new testament was first being assembled and again it was debated during the protestant reformation. The problem wasn't just that it described in great detail some of the more physical aspects of human love but a majority of it was written from a woman's point of view and the relationship that is described is one of equality, mutual love and respect.

The way that patriarchal, Jewish, scholars got around this was by treating it as Allegory. They decided that it was actually about God's complicated love of Israel and then the patriarchal Christian scholars decided it represented Christ's love for the church.

We probably will never know it's origins but I do believe if we think about it on a spiritual level either as an individual or a community it can invite us into deepening our relationship with God. We can put aside the overt sensuality of this song and focus more on the intimacy with our creator, the pure joy and unbounded freedom it celebrates. There is an entwining of souls, communion of spirits that is present in the language of this passage. In this way it is a very spiritual passage. In this way we can relate to God in a mystical and beautiful way.

I want to read it again, now think of it as God calling you from a depression, or urging you away from a toxic relationship, or think of it as God inviting you to walk in the woods, side by side and give your mind, a much needed break from thinking about pandemics, drone strikes, suicide bombers, illness, or family struggles. Hear it again:

"My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come... Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

Come away from all that pulls us down and makes us miserable. Come away from everything that steals your joy and robs your energy, just for a while. Let something inside you rise, and sing again.

Yes, of course, we need to do God's work in the world but we can't do it if we don't have some time to feel restored by the one who calls us to the work in the first place.

This scripture beckons us to surrender to God's love, to love God and be loved by God. It invites us to let go and let God have our trembling heart and our aching spirits. It allows God to soothe us, to give us peace, no matter what is going on in our lives or the world.

God calls us to relax our hearts and unclench our fists and just breathe and love. Love coming in with each breath and heart beat, love going out with each breath and heart beat.

Do it with me now for now, breathe in God's love for you, hold that love for a moment near to your heart, then breathe out your love for God. Love in, hold it near, love out.

This kind of spirituality, this kind of closeness with God stands in such contrast to the religiosity present in our new testament reading this morning and it stands in sharp contrast to many religious practices still today.

Jesus reminds us that it is not through our heads, or our logic and reason but through our hearts and our spirits. Like Jesus said 'these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. We have to offer God our hearts.

Now I am all for washing your hands before eating, but never once in my life did I think that God wouldn't love me if I didn't. I think Jesus understood this. Jesus understood God in a very close and tender way. Through prayer, through meditation, relationship and ministry Jesus showed us how we can be closer to God as well.

Rev. Lindsay wrote this week in Sermon Seeds "The Pharisees want God in a box, neat and orderly. They resist the God who surprises with extraordinary grace, uncommon compassion, and liberating freedom.

They don't understand the God who did not intend to prescribe a set of rules in the first place. They reject the God who does not reject the ones they demean, deride, and denounce. Jesus presents the Holy One of Love and they want the Sovereign of law and order."

I understand this inclination, I like to know the rules. I can't stand not knowing what is expected of me, but I have also learned that it is often when I let go, and I allow myself to fall apart that if I let God put me back together again that with every re-knitting I get a little more dependent on God.

I become a little closer and a little more trusting that no matter how hard I fall that God will be there to pick me up. We don't have to follow any human made doctrines to know the depth of God's love or feel unburdened by the touch of God's grace.

It is not something that comes because we behave a certain way and it doesn't come because of who we are but because of who God is. God's love is not a light that can be turned off or on, God's love is always on for us.

But none of that happens in our minds, it all happens in our spirits, we can't think ourselves closer to God, or reason ourselves into faith. We have to surrender to God in our spirits.

In order to feel that closeness with God, we have to let go of the people, places and things that we can not control that keep us bound up in fear or resentment, that make us listen more to our ego than to our creator and keep the doors barred to peace and wholeness and joy.

Do that with me now. Keep breathing in that love deeply and then picture yourself surrendering the people into God's care that you are worried about, that you are struggling with, maybe they aren't living their life the way you think they should, or they are ill. Breath in God and surrender them to God, let go of them in your spirit and put them in God's hands. It doesn't mean you love them any less if you let go of them. Breath in God's love for you, breath out your love of God and just let go.

Again sermon seeds added this to the conversation; "No priest was needed to mediate his message; Jesus brought it directly to the people. Jesus invited them into a direct relationship with the Holy Love and liberated them from the expectations and limits of human tradition.

It might make us uncomfortable to know we have this much freedom in God. That there are so few rules. But God guides us, when we are firmly connected in relationship to God our heart will tell us right from wrong, our love for God and neighbor will act like beacons in the fog of a messy world.

Try that this week, start your days with this breathing in and out of the holy. Hear God beckon you to come away, come away from all your struggles and surrender yourself to the holiest of all loves. AMEN

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