

Ps. 45:1-2, 6-9

Epistle: James 1:17-27

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

Lesson: Song of Solomon 2:8-13 (Courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

2:8 The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.

2:9 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.

2:10 My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;

2:11 for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

2:12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

2:13 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.

Living in the Moment of Love

Believe it or not, in the movie "Keeping Mum", a British comedy about the very unique challenges of one pastor's wife in a small village in England, there is a reference to this scripture. It seems the Pastor, Walter Goodfellow, has been so very busy caring for his flock and trying to fill the role of pastor, that he has somehow lost his humanity and had been ignoring his family, and in particular his wife, Gloria.

She has shared a bit of her frustration with the new Nanny, Grace, and since Grace wants to help the family, she sets out to put everything right. She goes to the pastor and openly begins a discussion about sex, saying there is a lot about sex in the Bible, look at Songs of Solomon. To which the pastor attempts to respond theologically, but Grace is adamant, "No! It's about sex!" And as a result of the pastor reading the same familiar texts with a different vantage point, his marriage is relieved, and his life begins a transformation.

Now, don't expect me to break into Queen Latifa's song "Let's Talk About Sex", I'll tell you right now, I may have said the word a few times, but this will not be a sermon about sex. This is a sermon about intense love.

It seems theologians have been discussing the meaning of this text for thousands and thousands of years, probably since it was written hundreds of years before Christ! Some early Jewish theologians said this was an analogy: the Bridegroom was Yahweh; the Jewish Nation was the Bride. Other Jewish mystics said the Groom was the active intellect and the Bride the passive. Christian theologians have said the Groom is Jesus and the Bride the Church. Luther claimed the Groom was Solomon and the Bride was the State, and that Solomon was expressing his thankfulness for their loyalty. And yet others saw it as God being the groom and wisdom was the bride.

So you see, there are a whole lot of possibilities out there for this text. Some theologians over the years have even claimed it doesn't belong in the scriptures, but every time a debate arises, some well respected theologian saves it from oblivion, because regardless of who or what the lovers were, it is one of the world most beautiful texts. It expresses that moment of love, profoundly.

Everyone loves something or someone, and if they don't, this text brings to light a goal of where we could be. I am of the belief that *God is love*, and this song represents *the feeling of God shared between two entities*. Be that entity, wisdom, a partner, a child, a friend, the church, the law, nature, God, Jesus, even the love of a hobby . . . this song clearly shares that moment of *thrill* when one is very happy, feeling like you are floating - "leaping upon the mountains" - and seeing signs of hope in all that lay around us, "the winter is past . . . the time of singing has come".

This text shares that moment of feeling *faithful* human love. There is a trust between the two entities in this text, an understanding that in this moment there is nothing that could ever come between the two. We humans are a bit more cautious, we all have learned that we can be hurt by those we have trusted. But the human being has been given the possibility to feel that moment of faithfulness, as a glimpse of God's love. There may be times when

we feel as though God has let us down, but when we hold out a little bit longer and a little bit longer, in trust, we find that God has taken our disappointments and caused them to be strengths.

The word used for *Passion* in the Song of Solomon can also be translated as *zeal* or *jealousy* - strong words all. When we feel love, when we touch on that moment of awareness of the power of God, we can be passionate, zealous, and even jealous. There is an energy in this Book of the bible that we all can relate to; it is something indescribably personal and intense.

Jesus knew this moment of intense carefree adoration. In our gospel for today the Disciples seemed to be so hungry and carefree that they forgot to wash their hands before eating, as was the tradition. And some Pharisees used this as an opportunity to attack Jesus personally. I see it as a bit of jealousy, but that is my personal spin on it. Jesus, who feels passionate towards his followers, and therefore sides immediately with them, sees what is going on. Those harsh judges didn't love the people as God did, otherwise they would have been sitting along with them.

No, the Pharisees here wanted to use their tradition to separate themselves from others; they wanted to lift themselves up and put others down. They somehow stopped caring about others and were only concerned with their own vain interests. They seemed more concerned about adhering to some written human word than listening to the compassionate, loving spirit of a LIVING real, true, faithful God. They put themselves outside the moment of love.

Sitting in judgment of other people, living only in our own world, and using our own standards as guidelines for the behaviors of others, in order to prove to ourselves that we are superior, means we put ourselves out of living in the moment of love.

In the epistle James writes, "be doers of the word and not merely hearers" and Jesus is quoted as reciting Isaiah, "this people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, teaching human precepts as doctrines."

Hanging on to that moment of love that Solomon exemplifies in his writings is what being a person of faith is all about. When you are in that moment, you feel too happy to taint it with any sort of nastiness. One is full of life and energy and compassion. Living in love makes one sensitive to those places where love is not present, and enables us to help out of sympathy.

Love is faithful and kind, and love comes from God. If we look only into our human nature for our guidance, we could easily find the list at the end of the gospel, "fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly." That is a list of things which are done only for the self and totally without consideration for those around us.

Now, this is painful. It is painful mostly for those who are the objects of the selfish acts, but it also painful for the witnesses of them and for the perpetrators themselves. In a way, we could call the Pharisees 'Bullies', and in 2003 a woman named Barbara Coloroso wrote a book called, "*The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander*". The premise of her book is that the cycle of violence has three victims - those who are bullied, those who witness the act, and lastly, the bullies themselves. She looks at each group and searches for way to help each one out of the cycle of violence and into circles of caring.

The quote beginning the book is from the movie *Chocolat*, Peter Henri says, "I think we can't go around measuring our goodness by what we don't do, by what we deny ourselves, what we resist, and who we exclude. I think we've got to measure goodness by what we embrace, what we create, and who we include."

Being a Christian is not about observing a bunch of man-made rules, but by following carefully and clearly the voice of our beloved. That spirit is creative and unique to each soul in each situation, but the beloved is there for us and is very real. The spirit calls us out of ourselves - out of our fears, and into compassion and action for others. Paul wrote, "Those who look into the perfect law . . ." what is the perfect law? It is not what humans have written over the years in this Bible, yes, inspired by their experience of faith, but the perfect law is the law that the living beloved God inspires on our hearts. The perfect law is freedom from ordinances and simply taking actions of compassion as called into being at the moment of inspiration.

When we act according to something someone wrote, and not out of commitment to a living God who is with us in this moment to inspire us out of the moment of love, then we are denying that God is real in this moment. Our

scriptures can guide us into a closer relationship with God, but they are not God. Scriptures can easily be used by us to separate us, as it did the Pharisees.

So let us commit ourselves every minute of the day to search for that intense love that is offered through the living God - whom we can come to more easily through understanding the life of Jesus. Jesus looked on the souls of those around him and made them his priority. He lifted them up, comforted them, reached out for them, healed them, loved them, and served them. He was willing to suffer torture and wrongful death to help others to understand the compassion of God. He showed us that we could trust all moments with God, who is love. Amen.