

August 29th, 2021

Song of Solomon 2:8-13 “Uninhibited”

There’s only two or three times during the lectionary’s three-year cycle that we get to read from the Song of Solomon. And the weird thing is it’s always *this* passage. Chapter 2:8-13. If you were to follow the lectionary strictly, this is what you’d get every ... single ... time. I’ve got to say, though, I’m sure glad to have it on the list this week. Since we’ve been working our way through King David’s dynasty for the last couple of months, I think it’s about time that we end this study on a high note. I think Hebrew love poetry is the perfect way to end this series because we’ve all heard about enough of David and Solomon’s shenanigans. It’s time to leap upon the mountains and bound over the hills like a gazelle.

Let me give you a little context for this book and fill you in on why it probably doesn’t show up in the lectionary more often. As you know by now, the Bible isn’t just one book. It’s a collection of many books written in a variety of genres by multiple authors. Even though this isn’t the only book of poetry in the Bible, it’s the only one dedicated to extoling the virtues of passionate, intimate, uninhibited physical love. Without a doubt, this is the sexiest book in the Bible. Not everybody likes this book though. Martin Luther, the original Protestant 14th century reformer didn’t think it had a place in the Biblical canon. Too earthy. Too fleshy. But then again, he didn’t like the Book of Revelation or the Gospel of John either. Poor Marty. Did he not see the value of the fig tree that puts forth it’s figs and the blossoms of the vines that bring forth their fragrance? Did his heart not melt at the sound of, “Arise my love, my fair one, and come away?” Even the various compilers of the New Common Lectionary and even the Revised New Common lectionary have had a difficult time trying to figure out what to do with this book over the years. What other explanation is there for it to only to show up a few times during the three-year cycle? Are they afraid of what’s in this book? Do they not trust preachers to have the

wisdom and imagination to proclaim God’s word as it is made known in this book? And why do they only give us this very short passage? Sure, chapter two has some great lines. But what about chapter four when King Solomon tells his lover,

Your eyes are doves
behind your veil.

Your hair is like a flock of goats,
moving down the slopes of Gilead.

Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes
that have come up from the washing,
all of which bear twins,
and not one among them is bereaved.

Your lips are like a crimson thread,
and your mouth is lovely.

Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate
behind your veil.

Your neck is like the tower of David,
built in courses;
on it hang a thousand bucklers,
all of them shields of warriors.

Your two breasts are like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle,
that feed among the lilies.

Of course this book belongs in the Bible. And as such, it should be proclaimed loud and proud among God’s people. This book is all about anticipation and preparation. It’s all about longing for something intoxicatingly good and beautiful. It’s about anticipatory joy and joyful delight. It’s playful. It’s not raunchy, but it is randy. This book was written to stir the senses and open our heart of hearts. When I read passages from this book I think of the Disney animated film the *Lion King* when the young would-be king Simba is reunited with his childhood friend and soon to be lover Nala while a meercat and a warthog sing, “Can You Feel the Love Tonight.” My question this

morning is, “As individuals and as a church, how can we capture this frolicking, playful joy in our mission, our witness and our worship?”

I think there’s three ways we can do this.

1.) Part of what I see here in this passage is how God’s love is interconnected with the whole of creation. This book is filled with imagery from creation: Deer bounding through the hills, winter giving way to spring, flowers growing in the earth, birds singing, and fruit growing on trees. I think sometimes we only see the earth as this spherical vessel for an unlimited supply of natural resources to mine, harvest or hunt. When we see the earth in this way, we fail to see the interconnectedness of how we all fit into the big picture of creation. You can enjoy the beauty of a goat or a deer or a pheasant without feeling like you have to kill it and eat it. You can enjoy blossoms on a cherry tree without feeling like you have to plow a field and divert water to create an entire orchard of cherry trees. You can enjoy the beauty of the rugged hills and mountains without planning on how you’re going to extract silver, gold, or coal. You can enjoy the shade of a pristine old growth forest without wondering how many board feet of timber you can harvest. Am I saying we shouldn’t mine, harvest or hunt? No. But I am saying that we should learn to live in loving harmony with the earth and be good stewards of what God has provided. We rightfully condemn exploitative conjugal relationships where one person is treated like a commodity and there’s no equal power in the relationship. We’re familiar with the term “gold-digger,” right? That title is not reserved just for prospectors and miners. It’s used to describe someone who selfishly uses and abuses a partner in a romantic relationship to get something they want. So then why do we continue to use and abuse our natural resources and then act all surprised when the earth protests and pushes back? The church could be out there on the front lines using this amazing Hebrew love poetry to set a joyful and positive example of what treating the earth with respect, dignity and love is all about.

2.) Another way we can highlight the good news of this “Song of Songs” is by modeling how God’s love for us is inseparable, exciting, open-ended, and hope-filled. Can we honestly say that we get the same feelings about our relationship with God as when we first meet someone that we fall in love with? Unfortunately, the church often portrays God’s interactions with humans in a negative way. It seems that the church wants to find ways to communicate how God is jealous, quick to punish, easy to anger, unpredictable, never satisfied and keeps raising the bar of expectations about how we should behave. But that sounds more like the kind of person who should be doing jail time for habitual domestic abuse. This book portrays God as one who is eager to please and who actually delights in us. How do we communicate to the world that God is more like the latter than the former? How do we convince the world that God celebrates us as much as King Solomon celebrated his bride-to-be? Well, for one thing, we can dust off this book more often and encourage people to read and learn from it rather than waiting for one Sunday in three years to put six verses of one chapter on the reading list!

3.) The Jewish tradition lifts up the Song of Solomon as a metaphor for God’s special relationship with Israel. After all, the Hebrew people are known as “God’s chosen people.” Not stumbled upon. Not overpowered and taken. Chosen. God’s relationship with Israel was and is special. And then it was revealed that God’s love extends to *all* nations to *all* people, and that *all* humans in God’s creation are God’s chosen. The Christian tradition picked up on this too. Christians lift this book up as a reminder of God’s love shown through Jesus. In Ephesians 5:22-33, the Apostle Paul compares the union of a married couple to that of Christ and the Church. All four gospels contain parables that Jesus told his disciples illustrating that his followers are like brides awaiting the groom. And then in the Book of Revelation 22, John writes, “And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

We are the bride of Christ. We are the ones who are waiting in eager anticipation for something really good to happen. This book needs to be heard in the church. Unfortunately it gets set aside because “it’s that book in the Old Testament that’s all about sex.” And everybody snickers and laughs when it comes up. And I’m guilty of exploiting this book in that way too. I used to teach a public speaking class for an annual youth leadership event back on the east coast. The two books I used for the kids to practice their public speaking was Dr. Seuss’s *Green Eggs and Ham* and passages from the *Song of Solomon*, just to see if they could read it with a straight face and with conviction. Now that I look back, I’ve got to confess that I’ve disrespected this book as have many others throughout the history of the church.

This book deserves better. This book shatters the division between spirit and body and the idea that somehow the spirit is holy and the body is wicked. What other conclusion can we draw from this book of poetry if not to lead us into a greater understanding of God? It is a celebration of God’s love for us and God’s desire for us to draw us closer to the heart of God. Let the words of this book be holy to you, and may we know that we are patiently and passionately loved by the Creator of all that is. Amen.