

Something To Love
United Church of Broomfield
August 29, 2021

JAMES 1:17-27 CEB

17 Every good gift, every perfect gift, comes from above. These gifts come down from the Father, the creator of the heavenly lights, in whose character there is no change at all. 18 He chose to give us birth by his true word, and here is the result: we are like the first crop from the harvest of everything he created. 19 Know this, my dear brothers and sisters: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to grow angry. 20 This is because an angry person doesn't produce God's righteousness. 21 Therefore, with humility, set aside all moral filth and the growth of wickedness, and welcome the word planted deep inside you—the very word that is able to save you. 22 You must be doers of the word and not only hearers who mislead themselves. 23 Those who hear but don't do the word are like those who look at their faces in a mirror. 24 They look at themselves, walk away, and immediately forget what they were like. 25 But there are those who study the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continue to do it. They don't listen and then forget, but they put it into practice in their lives. They will be blessed in whatever they do. 26 If those who claim devotion to God don't control what they say, they mislead themselves. Their devotion is worthless. 27 True devotion, the kind that is pure and faultless before God the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their difficulties and to keep the world from contaminating us.

Song of Solomon 2:8-13 CEB

8 Listen! It's my lover: here he comes now,
leaping upon the mountains,
bounding over the hills.
9 My lover is like a gazelle
or a young stag.
Here he stands now,
outside our wall,
peering through the windows,
peeking through the lattices.
10 My lover spoke and said to me,
"Rise up, my dearest,
my fairest, and go."
11 Here, the winter is past;
the rains have come and gone.
12 Blossoms have appeared in the land;
the season of singing has arrived,
and the sound of the turtledove is heard in our land.
13 The green fruit is on the fig tree,
and the grapevines in bloom are fragrant.
Rise up, my dearest,
my fairest, and go.

"A Raisin In the Sun" is a play about a black family on Chicago's southside. The father dies and leaves a small legacy in the form of an insurance policy - several thousand dollars. The mother was going to use the money

to fulfill a longtime dream of buying a small bungalow for the family to live in. It would not be the Taj Mahal, but they would be able to move out of the tenements and call it their own. The son also had a dream. He'd never had a decent job, so he convinces the mother to give him the money as an investment in a business deal (a deal that couldn't miss). The mother wanted happiness for her children more than anything. And so, she gives him the money, and the so-called "friend" of the son promptly skips town with the money. The young man is left alone to face his mother and sister. His shoulders are slumped in defeat, his head bows low as he tells them the money is gone.

The sister, Benethea, rips into him. She screams at him. She calls him names. In every way possible she lets loose on him with contempt and scorn. When she finishes her tirade the mother speaks, "I thought I taught you to love him." Benethea shouts back, "Love him? There is nothing left to love."

The mother says, "There is always something left to love. And if you ain't learned that, you ain't learned nothing. Have you cried for that boy today? I don't mean for yourself and the family 'cause we lost the money. I mean for him; what he been through and what it done to him. Child, when do you think is the time to love somebody the most? When they done good and made things easy for everybody? Well then, you ain't learning - because that ain't the time at all. It's when he's at his lowest and can't believe in hisself 'cause the world done whipped him so. When you starts measuring somebody, measure him right child, measure him right."

Human measuring, like human love, is rarely satisfactory. The measure of God towards God's "beloved" is different. An old hymn says:

When we have exhausted our store of endurance;
When our strength has failed 'ere the day is half done;
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father's forgiving is only begun.
His love has no limit,
His grace has no measure,
His power has no boundary known unto man;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again

The Song of Solomon, a.k.a. Song of Songs or The Canticles is translated, "The Most Beautiful Songs". It is seen by many as the most exquisite poetic expression of human love you could ever read. Others have struggled with it, especially being seen as part of the Biblical Canon. In the first century, many rabbis were opposed to adding the poems to the Biblical Canon because they were far too sexual, erotic, and explicit. However, more influential rabbis interpreted the allegory as the love of God for humanity. Subsequently, Christian scholars have likewise interpreted the poems as Jesus' love for his bride, the church.

Some say that the poetry of Song of Songs shows us how the nature of God caused God to draw near to us, so that God could reveal God's self to us, as well as fall in love with us.

King Solomon, for whom the book is often named, almost certainly did not write the book, given that the speaking voice is mostly that of a young woman. She is named at the start of the book; chapter one verse five says,

I am black and beautiful,
O daughters of Jerusalem,
like the tents of Kedar,
like the curtains of Solomon.

The songs and poetry of The Canticles share the beauty of love, going back and forth between two lovers. She hears his voice and sees her young stag coming toward her home. She is standing behind a screen-like window. It is made of wooden-lattice, arranged so that she can see him, but he cannot see in. Rooms like this were often built on the second story of homes, extending over the busy streets. There, a young woman could watch the interesting people passing by below and catch the cool evening breezes.

Like the lover coming to find the beautiful protagonist, God came two thousand years ago as a babe in a manger to reveal God's self to us. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb." Jesus came to reveal God to a world full of darkness.

We are like the beautiful protagonist - we play a role as Christians, helping to reveal God to the world. That is our task. Citrienne, bishop of Carthage in 252 AD, lived during a horrible plague in which Christians were blamed for the disease. Citrienne led the church people to care for the dying, bury the dead, and fight the dreaded plague. The Christians of that time embodied James direction to act, morally and justly, revealing the love of God and Christ and putting into practice the laws of God and the ways of Jesus.

This is the revealing love of Christ, come into a heart. Jesus taught us that it was the deeds done through faith that revealed the condition of the heart. God came to reveal the Divine and charged the church to continue that revelation daily, through an intimate and beautiful love of humanity, as well as a conscientious and righteous love.

Do you recall what it is like to fall in love? Think back to those first dizzying waves of colliding senses; when your heart leaps, and everything is intensified in a rush of exploding wonder. Life seems to surround like a sea of sweet and gentle breezes. Suddenly there is the existential knowledge that life was made for love. When you're apart from your love, you're busy savoring the thought of their image and essence.

The Poet's imagery in the Songs is the remembering of "dove eyes" of the well-beloved, the rose of Sharon. When together, regardless of age, time or circumstances, new lovers are overpowered with each other's presence (like a "bundle of myrrh"). There is the sense of being lost in abandonment, totally absorbed. The protagonist's voice in the Song felt the "banner over me was love" and it "ravished my heart."

To fall in love is to be irresistibly drawn, inexorably to the source of that love. Jesus came to be in love with His own. Standing on a hill outside of Jerusalem Jesus cried, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ...How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"¹

The Poet pictured the "beloved" as a young roe, or gazelle. If we could steal away right now to the edge of the farmer's field; and if it were early morning or late evening in the springtime...we might catch a glimpse of a young gazelle peering through the barrier at the young and tender shoots of the farmer's crop. Tall fences and wide ditches, and the rocks the farmer might throw are small obstacles when you are drawn to that which you

¹ Matthew 23:37, NRSV.

love. The poem tells us that all winter it has been bark and brambles...Now there are tender green shoots. It is a time for creation, love, and care. The gazelle must enjoy the blossoming harvest.

Jesus brought this love with Him from heaven. He came to earth, to us to fall in love. And His beloved, humanity, hung Him on a cross. For you and I that might have ended a love affair. Divorce would have been the first words on my lips. But the first words on the mouth of Jesus were, "My God, forgive them."

God entered time and space in a manger in Bethlehem, grew up and died as a voluntary sacrifice in our place. God did that because we are God's beloved, and God wished to reveal God's self and all that is divine to us and fall in love with us. Are you listening to the word? Do you recognize the good gifts and perfect presents from heaven?

What do you say to such love? God wants to hear you say, "Yes, I love you, Lord. I will give myself to you." And we know that actions speak louder than words. So, after declaring our love to God, how do we show God that we are hearing, we are listening and we are truly in this relationship, seeing the revealed God and revealing ourselves? We take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and keep ourselves from being corrupted by the world.

AMEN