

God That Felt Good – Fifth in series on Christian Intimacy

Song of Songs 2: 8-17 (*The Message*)

Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV

14th Sunday after Pentecost (August 30) 2015

The Woman

⁸⁻¹⁰ Look! Listen! There's my lover!

Do you see him coming?

Vaulting the mountains,

leaping the hills.

My lover is like a gazelle, graceful;

like a young stag, virile.

Look at him there, on tiptoe at the gate,

all ears, all eyes—ready!

My lover has arrived

and he's speaking to me!

The Man

¹⁰⁻¹⁴ Get up, my dear friend,

fair and beautiful lover—come to me!

Look around you: Winter is over;

the winter rains are over, gone!

Spring flowers are in blossom all over.

The whole world's a choir—and singing!

Spring warblers are filling the forest

with sweet arpeggios.

Lilacs are exuberantly purple and perfumed,

and cherry trees fragrant with blossoms.

Oh, get up, dear friend,

my fair and beautiful lover—come to me!

Come, my shy and modest dove—

leave your seclusion, come out in the open.

Let me see your face,

let me hear your voice.

For your voice is soothing

and your face is ravishing.

The Woman

¹⁵ Then you must protect me from the foxes,

foxes on the prowl,

Foxes who would like nothing better

than to get into our flowering garden.

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ My lover is mine, and I am his.

Nightly he strolls in our garden,

Delighting in the flowers

until dawn breathes its light and night slips

away.

Turn to me, dear lover.

Come like a gazelle.

Leap like a wild stag

on delectable mountains!

This sermon series began four weeks ago, and we used this morning's scripture as our call to worship, to lay out from the beginning where we were headed. We began with the notion that Christian Unity is one of the most important acts we can, and should practice. And for the next three weeks, we have looked at ways in which that should happen, including last week, the notion that instead of so many times making instant Reactions, we should HIT THE PAUSE BUTTON, remember our DNA as Christians, and then Go forth boldly.

One of the key principles that was repeated in sermons is:

1. **All of life is fragile.** We have to let go of the gods of security and of control. They consume us. They take us away from the Gospel. They NEVER work out.
2. **All of life is gift.**
3. **It needs to be shared.**

We looked at the importance of the words we say, and the importance of the paths that we walk. But, today, we come back to where we began, with this reading from Song of Songs.

There is a variety of ways that the “Song of Songs” (also known as “Song of Solomon”) has been interpreted:

1. Love story between two **anonymous lovers** – i.e. read literally. It doesn't matter what is said in the Bible; some people always read it literally. But, sometimes a garden is just a garden.
2. Historical account of a love story between **King Solomon** and a peasant woman. – i.e. an historical literalism.
3. An Allegory of the Love of God for **for Israel**
4. An Allegory of the Love of Christ for **His Church**. Saints of the Church throughout the ages have received much spiritual enlightenment from putting themselves into one of the gender roles and experiencing this union with Jesus.

Aside from these possible interpretations, the larger question is: **Why is this book in our Bible?** Or, to put it a different way: **What message can we get from this?**

Now, I grant you that where I am going with this, now, may cause some of you to get uncomfortable. We often make reference to “FOUR LETTER WORDS” in the church. There are some “four letter words” that we tell our children are dirty words, that they ought to never say – and in a former generation would result in the mouth being washed out with soap. Some examples would include ... well, you remember.

There are also “four letter words” that we often say, but hardly ever do, like “F A S T” and “P R A Y”

And then there are some “FOUR LETTER WORDS” that don't even have that many letters, but are treated like they are “FOUR LETTER WORDS” – like the three letter word that begins with “S” and ends with “X” and is not an abbreviation for a saxophone.

We have this taboo about even saying it, and certainly not from the pulpit.

Well, today, THAT taboo is being ignored. For some, this will be uncomfortable. Some will quit listening because of the taboo. Some will quit listening because they are trying to find the old hymn in their hymnal: “PRECIOUS MEMORIES.”

And some folks will dive into filling in the blanks in the sermon notes tear off sheet of the bulletin in order to keep their heads down.

But, nonetheless, here we go – into this VERY IMPORTANT discussion necessary in a sermon series on CHRISTIAN UNITY.

For nearly all of her history, the Church has mostly relegated **human sexuality** to a banal moralistic list of “**Thou Shalt Not**’s. There is almost nowhere in the life of the Church where the **God-given JOY** of **human sexuality** is celebrated. Let me say that phrase again – because it is important: **God-given JOY** of **human sexuality**

Can you remember your first lover? (Some of you by now have figured out that “Precious Memories” is not in the Red nor Black hymnals. The closest you can find is “Precious Name” - #536.)

Can you remember your first lover. I can. Her name was Jane Wentz. (And this is the part where my wife Jane gets uncomfortable.) I remember that young love – back in the days where there was no such thing as a cordless phone, let alone cell phone – and I would sit for hours at a time in the bottom of my closet, thinking that no one could hear me, with the extension cord on the telephone dragged in there with me. We talked and we talked for such long time. Nothing in the world was more important in my life.

I knew that I was not the strongest, most athletic, smartest, best dressed, most handsome fellow in Parkersburg High School. But here was the deal:

Glimpsing oneself not as perfect but as perfect for someone: wanted and sought after is a cause for singing!

That is at the root of human sexuality. That is at the root of knowing the love of God.

But when we won't talk about, nor lift up, the importance of human sexuality in the church, then we have relegated our children and youth to learn about it "in the world" where access is certainly free and abundant, but that free access does not equate with any kinds of notions of responsible, let alone beautiful and HOLY.

Glimpsing oneself not as perfect but as perfect for someone: wanted and sought after is a the root of the God-given joy of human sexuality AND it is at the root of knowing the love of God.

It's very hard to love without first having known being loved.

So, we have this wonderful book in the Bible: "The Song of Songs" which goes right down into the depths and delicacies of human sexuality – what we might call "Hard R" rated. (Oh, no, not today's reading. Go home and read the whole book out loud, and you will know what I mean.) Why? TO celebrate the God's gift, called human sexuality, which is part of the song of human loving.

And, until we get over our taboos, and begin to celebrate all of God's gifts, then we will have a hard time celebrating, or even realizing, what it means to be perfectly lovable and perfectly acceptable, by God our lover, even though we are not at all perfect, in any sense of the word. And **GOD, THAT FEELS GOOD!** Only lovers can understand that. Lovers – far more than mere moralists, or even mere theologians.

And lovers – they know how to sing! In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.