

August 29, 2021  
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Song of Solomon 2:8-13 Love Songs  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Song of Solomon 2:8-13

New Revised Standard Version

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.

The rabbinic legend says that King Solomon wrote three books of the Bible - Song of Solomon when he was young, Proverbs when he was middle-aged, and Ecclesiastes when he was old. Of course, King Solomon probably didn't write any of them.<sup>1</sup> Song of Solomon is also known as Song of Songs and it is a love song voiced by two different people to one another. We don't know who the people are. Some people suggest that the poems might be between King Solomon and one of his brides. But most scholars agree that these poems are more likely anonymous love poems.

There is a satirical website called "The Babylon Bee" that proposed putting some of the lines from Song of Solomon onto those little pink candy hearts that you get at Valentine's Day. For example, "Hey, tower neck. You have goat hair. Your teeth are sheep."<sup>2</sup> Those beautiful lines come from Song of Solomon chapter 4. When we read Song of Solomon, we have to get way outside of our cultural frame of reference. It says in Song of Solomon, My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. I for one have not been called any of those things.

Much of the speech in this book is lost on our modern ears because it doesn't speak to our experience. But I have to admit to you, I don't understand a lot of the language in our current culture. I have to google texting shorthand. What does "tbh" in a text mean? After googling, I can tell you it means "to be honest". "Irl"? That means "in real life". I wonder if we were to update the language in Song of Solomon for today, what would we say? You've pushed the right button? My hormones are in warp speed for you?<sup>3</sup> I don't even know how to begin speaking in twenty-first century erotic speech.

There are beautiful passages in Song of Solomon and you might have heard parts of these at a wedding. "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song of Solomon 2:16). There is a wonderful passage about water, "many waters cannot quench love, nor floods drown it" (Song of Solomon 8:7). Today we read these poetic words, "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." A pastor friend of mine read these verses at a marriage for a couple where both of their spouses had died. This couple had met in a grief support group. However grim things may have been in seasons past, winter will yield to spring. The rain will go, flowers will appear, and the season of glad songs will arrive at last. Winter will yield to spring. It's hard to imagine winter right now with our 100 degree days, but remember when you were so excited to trade your coat for shorts and boots for flip-flops?

In Song of Solomon there is beautiful imagery of nature, fruit, wine, animals and flowers. There is springtime, the change from winter rain to sunshine, perfumed flowers and fruit, animals like the gazelle and the turtledove, showing us a garden of delights enjoyed by two

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobson, Rolf. Sermon Brainwave podcast - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmk5ejtyXVI>

<sup>2</sup> Jacobson, Rolf. Sermon Brainwave podcast - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmk5ejtyXVI>

<sup>3</sup> New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: Song of Songs. P. 395.

people who belong together. There is flirting in the Bible! This is the mutual attraction and fulfillment of two people in a relationship of sexuality and of love. Two people who passionately desire one another and who celebrate that desire. These words of scripture remind us to proclaim God's goodness in creation and celebrate the loving relationship between two people.

Song of Solomon is not like any other book in the Bible. Flip open the Bible to any other page and you will find conflict, politics, laws, God speaking, Jesus speaking, but turn to Song of Solomon and you will find sensuality, longing, intimacy, playfulness, and human affection. We get to peek behind the curtain and see what life was like in private ancient Israel. Song of Solomon is unique as a book of the Bible because God is not mentioned. There is only one other book of the Bible that doesn't mention God, the book of Esther. Song of Solomon is also the only biblical book in which a female voice dominates. More than fifty-six verses are attributed to the female speaker and thirty-six to the male speaker. Not only does this woman speak but she is assertive, uninhibited, and unabashed about her sexual desires.

Song of Solomon is one of the most disputed books in the Hebrew Bible. The rabbis had hotly disputed whether this book should be in the Bible. It was finally let in because it was seen as a parable between God and the people. Early Christians understood the love poems as between Christ and the Church. But, Song of Solomon has value as a celebration of human love. You might be wondering, what does love poetry have to do with the life of faith? When we love, we think of someone besides ourselves. When we love we get to practice being loved. Have you ever received a meal from someone? It is so much easier to give someone a meal than it is to receive. We have to practice being loved and receiving that love with joy.

The power of love is transformative. We have the power to be transformed in the relationships that we have, the friendships that we have, and as we enjoy nature and God's creation. God's grace transforms the world and the grace of the world transforms God.<sup>4</sup> As I read Song of Solomon this week (it's only eight chapters) I had a question that I want to ask you. Do you have a love affair with life? This book of erotic poetry that is in the Bible was the most commented upon book by the monks in Medieval monasteries. Human love and human sexuality is a gift and a joy from God.

We are called to live together in community and communion filled with hope. "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone." The winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The hard times are gone and we have to hope again. Yes, there are seasons of life that are no fun to go through, we are all going through one right now. But there is delight and joy to be found, there is love and connection outside of our isolation. We long to see in one another's faces the very image of the God who made us. We need the touch of one another's embrace to embody the act of loving our neighbors as ourselves. We desire beauty—to taste plump figs straight off the tree, to smell the lavender that blooms in the field, to hear the turtle doves as they lift their voices in song.<sup>5</sup>

Intimacy can be as frightening as it is fulfilling. There are dangers, unknowns, demands, and unforeseeable consequences. Reminds me of our relationship with God. Have you ever tried to play hide and seek with God? Our faith falters, our obedience is short-lived, our worship wanes, and our commitment to God must be reestablished again and again. There are so many stories like this in the Bible. Jeremiah refuses to preach, Elijah withdraws to a lonely cave, Jonah sails away to Tarshish, and Paul prowls the Damascus road.<sup>6</sup> We can go extraordinary lengths to

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<sup>4</sup> Henry-Crowe, Susan T. Feasting on the Word commentary. Year B, Volume 4.

<sup>5</sup> Christian Century Commentary - <https://mailchi.mp/christiancentury/sc-free-350975a-352535?e=d6e1e42378>

<sup>6</sup> New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: Song of Songs. P. 394.

resist God's claim upon us. Song of Solomon reminds us that our relationship with God, just like our relationship with people, has to be cultivated, nurtured, cherished, and safeguarded. Special moments with God do not just happen, they are cultivated. Intimacy with God costs us our time and our energy. We have to be willing to be present, to remain, to be accountable, to see things through, to come out from hiding to nurture our relationship with God and our relationship with other people.

We cannot take love for granted. Not from other people and not from God. We have to spend time with those we love and find time to talk with each other. There is beauty, love, joy, abundance, the sacred, and the possibility for happiness all around us in the ordinariness of our life, if we take the time to notice. There is sacredness in our lives, in laughter, in the thoughtful gesture of a friend, in the gentle breeze that blows across our face after a day at the office. There is holiness all around us, in an unexpected phone call from an old friend, a helping hand from a stranger, in the smell of freshly-baked bread, at the sight of fresh flowers. There is beauty all around us. We might have to lean close to see God's face and to hear God's voice in our lives, **but it is there.** Thanks be to God, Amen.