

Planting Sunday – Good Beginnings & Song of Solomon 2: 8-13

Good morning! Usually the United Methodist Lectionary is very straight forward. The scripture readings are as one would expect. And, fairly easy to share one's thought on the scripture – whether of Jesus, God, or one of the Prophets or Apostles. The September Lectionary Theme is a Season of Creation. Focus on God's love for the Earth and not just on us.

We have heard the Scriptures from the book, the Song of Solomon. As Terry just passionately read, this reading and book has taken a hard-left turn into a different realm. Maybe this part of the service should be rate PG or R. This Song of Solomon! What is this book doing in the Bible? The verses do not show relationship between God and man, God's "rules of order, like the 10 commandments, the laws of the Israelites as in Deuteronomy or Judges, or even the simple songs of David as in the Psalms.

It is like the writers of the Old Testament were burned out on all the serious writing. They let their hair and "guard" down. The reading is like a summer story and not the Bible.

What I am going to attempt is have everyone see these verses in different layers of meaning. Very similar to stories and parables by Jesus. There is the story but then there is the real story.

First, the Song of Solomon is a book not usually discussed or shared in the Church of today. In some corners these writings are considered too promiscuous and not clean for ears and mouths. The Book is known as the Song of Songs, the best song of all. There is no hard evidence of authorship. Though some say it was from the works of Solomon around 1012 BC. Also known as the Canticles, too. Canticle is a song or chant created from Bible text, and not from the songs of David, the Psalms. The verses read in the scripture are only the tip of love poems that are not just sweet and sentimental but strong and visual composition that

show passion between a woman and a man. Actually references are considered sexual and romantic.

As I said before, this material is for summer reading and not in the Bible? Let's think, again, about how Terry read the scripture. Let me repeat some of the phrases.

- Voice of my beloved
- He comes leaping and bounding among mountain and hills
- He looks like a young stag or gazelle – have any of you guys been called a stag or even a young buck?
- Arise, my love, my fair one, come away. Good line to use while dating or leaving a social gathering. how regal.
- Winter is past, rain is over
- Voice of turtle dove heard in the land...how beautiful
- Fig trees are blooming and vines give forth fragrance
- Again...arise my love, my fair one. Come away! How, do I dare say sexy! and Shakespearean

The woman is the focus and the messenger of words and creating this romantic mood. Woman, on this reading, we are reminded that we should listen to them. They should never be underestimated. And this woman is the antithesis of Eve in the Garden of Eden with Adam. There is unconditional love and trust. Like the author is reconciling the Adam and Eve scenario relationship. Notice the young stag does not enter the space that the woman is in. They are separated by lattice and foundation. There is trusting relationship as the man invites her out into God's world of fresh flowers, fruits, and hills. The sound of these words makes one feel good, cause a tingling feeling, and a grin on my face.

Let us shift thinking, a little. Put your church hat on. This stag or gazelle comes bounding and leaping over the countryside. Have you seen a

stag – they are bigger than deer but slighter smaller than an elk. Found in northern Europe and Asia. Beautiful, muscular features especially with 10-12-point antler rack. Could this be God! God is coming to see the Israelites in the Old Testament. He is inviting the Jews to come join him. Their wars were over, the hard life is being endured. They were to stand up and join the Good life, represented by flowers, figs, and the passing of winter and rain, with God's endless and unconditional love.

In the New Testament, we as Christians can look at ourselves as being the reader, the woman could be Christ speaking to us and the man or stag as God. The woman, described as wise to listen to, is telling us to get up and follow her as she joins God, in a Union that is stronger than one between woman and man. The winter rains can represent the trials and tribulations of Christ crescendoing at Jesus' crucifixion. That in joining Jesus Christ we will enter God's loving world through following Jesus. As it says, Arise, my love, my fair one and come away. This representing the strong bond of God, Jesus, and the Christian Church.

Now, up to now it has been all about us and Jesus and God and woman and man. How vain is that?

Well! God loves us. It is all about us. But God is not just all about us! What did you share with Betsy in the Call to Worship:

- Rejoice what God is doing in our world
- God has made us!
- God has made the whole universe and makes new things
- Worship our magnificent Creator

Jesus said to love God and love neighbor

He also said do unto others, as you would want have others do unto you.! Who said this has to be about people.

And the Lord's Prayer said "thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven

What about all the creeping crawling critters, the birds, the fish, reptiles, trees, mountains, rivers, oceans, ice caps and I could go on.

That woman is like us. The stag is God. She is saying that I am being told to leave my comfortable surroundings of lattice and foundation, and join him.

God is saying, "Come, see and share the rest of this world that I have created for myself to love and share with you, us, as my believing and not perfect children

I am not going to use this time to tell all the gloom and doom that is going on with Earth. I do have a little story to share about God's home that he made for us. And, how we have to educate each other. Help each other to understand this gift, Earth, that he has given us.

Some of you know I substitute Grades K thru 12. Mostly elementary and middle schools. I was in a 5<sup>th</sup> grade class discussing a poem with imagery...sheaves of wheat reaching for the sky one late afternoon in the Fall. Great imagery, at least I thought. I asked how many had seen a field. Some raised their hands and said, Mr. Blake, I have. Great! I responded Where? He proudly responded with, the Meadowlands! Another said Hanover Park football field and soccer field. The air went out of me. Only a handful had seen a real farm or hay field. This probably means their parents had not either, or even more disconcerting, it was no longer important to share in that experience

The seed I suggest we plant and I believe God and Jesus want to, too. Is go out and see the gift God has given us! Share it with others young and old, children, grandchildren, friends, spouses, important others. One of my joys is sharing my love and knowledge of God's world with children when the opportunity knocks. We talk about God's grace working

through Jesus thru us to share with others. Don't forget the others include Earth and the non- humans who live with us. We do need to share our grace with them, too.

So, we have taken apart of the Song of Songs or Song of Solomon – a very rapturous reading about an unconditional love between a woman and a man through beautiful surroundings and imagery of a stag or gazelle.

Then, there is strong unconditional love between God and the Jews and God/Jesus and the Christian Church. God said to both groups that the time is now to come and follow me.

And, lastly, but not least – just as important to make part of our faith – an invitation to actively be part of the Earth that God created with as much love as he has for us. Your Grace can plant seeds of hope and care for this Earth in the same loving way as God does. It is not too late.

Let's pray:

Dear God, thank you for loving us and speaking us through such beautiful verse that we have shared, today. Help us to trust you to show us the way, to follow Jesus. And, to share your grace with other humans and the animals and the Earth that you have given us. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.