

"I Like Him"

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:8-13 (NRSV) *The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. ⁹My 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. ¹⁰My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; ¹¹for now* | *the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. ¹²The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land. ¹³The 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.*

I was standing in a checkout line recently (before social distancing) and picked up one of the "rags" on the magazine rack. I flipped through and came across "the personals". For years I'd been looking for a way to move into today's scripture from the Lectionary, and I thought, "Here it is!" So I bought it. Here are some of the "personals" from that issue:

VIRGIN BRUNETTE sought to bear my children. But I'll settle for a movie date with a blonde! Silliness aside, I'm looking for a serious relationship with a very brainy feminine extrovert 24-35. I'm a 5'7" scientist with simple tastes who likes outdoors stuff and dancing.

CUDDLING LADY professional, 5'5' vivacious, well-dressed blue-eyed beauty, passionate, worldly, good conversationalist, golfer, tennis, dancing, etc. Mentally and financially secure. Seeking gentleman with same. Degreed, businessman only. 45+.

27, committed to God, strong build, attractive, likes kids, sports, romance, seeks spiritually committed woman around 18-35.

If we were putting together a time capsule to be opened 100 years from today, would you put that in it? What *will* historians think of the we court in the year, 2020? I shudder to think. What do we think of the way they courted in Sixth Century BC Jerusalem?

For those unfortunates who've not experienced it firsthand, the scripture verses today are the words of two people in love. Does it surprise you to find that kind of language in Holy Scripture? If you read the whole thing, it gets pretty spicy. An uninhibited Hebrew love poem, the Song of Solomon is one of only two books in the Bible that never to mention God. I'm not the only preacher to scratch his head over this Hebrew love poetry. Give us a rule, a law, some noble proverb or grim caution and we're off to the races. Give us a lazy summer afternoon, two young people on a blanket in Laurel Park, we start to get nervous.

"My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands....the fig tree has put forth its figs."

It's about love: exuberant, pointless, wonderful, love. Not the clean, holy agape of Christians and the church, but the messy, entangling eros of Hollywood and sixteen-year-olds.

In early stages love has been called "infatuation"—"puppy love." Never discount "puppy love"! It may be the most deepest of all emotions; and the symptoms

are familiar: being consumed with thoughts of each other; wanting constantly to be together; losing sleep; speaking poetically even if you're not a poet; wasting hours gazing deeply into each others' eyes across a candlelit table (or texting one another across that same table). All these are outward, visible signs of an inward, spiritual dislocation called love. And if you've never been there, you simply don't understand the insanity of it all.

At a deeper level, love is when two individuals feel united into a new reality called a "we".¹ Harvard philosopher, Robert Nozick, says, "the desire to form a 'we' is intrinsic to the nature of love..."²

Which explains why many lovers cling to the irrational idea that their beloved is the only right person in the world for them. It seems so right that it's virtually impossible to convince lovers that God didn't take a day off from dealing with the corona virus and racism to reach down from heaven and pair them up.

And because love is so specific—so personal—so unique, there's nothing more gracious you can do for another than to risk being seen by him/her in all your psychic and physical reality, to let your life get all mixed up in his/hers. There's simply not much more one can give another than that.

Love is that intensely personal and intimate relationship in which we throw caution to the wind and thoroughly and completely enjoy losing ourselves. Nothing's more wonderful, or much more dangerous. Nothing is more self-giving—or vulnerable—than being in love. Maybe that's why a whole generation has become notorious for avoiding commitment like the plague. We know in our heart of hearts how much it costs, how risky love is to our much cherished independence.

I wish I knew how to sort all this out; I wish I had guidelines to offer on how to know when it's "really" love and when it's just a consuming, self-centered infatuation, but I don't.

In fact, I'm struggling to find some way to justify my words to you today—some way to claim they'll do you any good. The Song of Solomon has, as far as I can tell, absolutely no edifying intent, no moral, no thought for the day, no helpful hints for homemakers. Love tends to be utterly impractical and even dysfunctional. To ask of lovers engaged in a kiss, "Now what good does that do?" shows an ignorance about love that runs so deep as to be pathetic.

But, isn't that exactly how God loves us: irrationally, recklessly given without reservation or concern for consequences or pay-back—given with no regard for whether we "deserve" it?

In "Man of La Mancha", Don Quixote's on a quest to "love pure and chaste

¹ See Robert Solomon, Love, Garden City, N.Y., Anchor Books, 1981.

² The Examined Life, p. 70, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1989.

from afar." He travels with his squire, Sancho Panza. They're prototypes of the American cowboy hero and his sidekick: sort of like Roy Rogers and Gabby Hayes.

Aldonza is a barmaid in a roadside inn, who supplements her income as a "Lady of the Evening." But Don Quixote sees in her a heart of purity and goodness and dignity no one else sees, and treats her with respect from the moment he sees her; which frustrates her, because she's not used to being treated like that by men. She keeps asking, "What do you want of me?" but she's never satisfied with his answer. She thinks there's gotta' be an angle.

Finally, she approaches Sancho, and asks, "Why do you follow him?"

Sancho responds, "Oh, that's easy to explain. It's because... Because..."

Aldonza presses the issue: "Why?"

Sancho sings: **"I like him. I really like him.
Don't ask me for why or wherefore
'Cause I don't have a single good because or therefore."**

Aldonza continues to press: "But what do you get out of it?"

Sancho responds, "What do I get out of it? Why, already I've gotten... I've gotten..."

She drives home the point: "You've got nothing! Why do you do it?"

Sancho sings again:

**"I like him. I really like him.
Make me freeze, make me fry,
Make me sigh, make me cry,
Still I'll yell to the sky
Tho' I can't tell you why
That I like him."**

It's totally irrational—no logic, no reason, and no payoff. Paul wrote to the Romans and said, *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (ROMANS 5:8 NIV)

So there's not much practical advice in today's sermon to help you make it through the week, or to strengthen you in your struggles as a Christian disciple. The sermon's been evoked by the Song of Solomon, and it's simply an invitation to join with these anonymous lovers of nearly three thousand years ago, and to celebrate and enjoy God's gift of uninhibited, exuberant, irrational, totally self-giving love.