

**Love Points**  
**Sermon 191 | Greystone Baptist Church | July 30, 2023**  
**Song of Songs 2:8-17**

(Romeo speaks in Act 2, Scene 2)

It is my lady, O, it is my love!  
O, that she knew she were!  
She speaks, yet she says nothing. What of that?  
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.  
I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks.  
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,  
Having some business, do entreat her eyes  
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.  
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?  
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,  
As daylight doth a lamp. Her eye in heaven  
Would, through airy region, stream so bright  
That birds would sing and think it were not night.  
See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand.  
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,  
That I might touch that cheek!

Ay me! (Juliet)

O, speak again, bright angel, for thou art  
As glorious to this night, being o'er my head,  
As is a winged messenger of heaven  
Unto the white upturned wond'ring eyes  
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him  
When he bestrides the lazy puffing clouds  
And sails upon the bosom of the air. (Romeo)<sup>1</sup>

The literature nerds in the room all know what comes next, right?

O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?

This one line might just be the most famous line in all of English literature. Or, if you are - like I am - a child of the 90s, one of the most famous lines from the 1996 film starring Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio. (Which we later learned to appreciate in a larger context when we made it to our high school level English classes.)

No matter where or when your first rendezvous with these clandestine lovers occurred, once you encounter their story, the plight of Romeo and Juliet is nearly impossible to forget. It sears its story on our hearts the way Juliet's balcony cry out to her lover is seared upon our minds.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://myshakespeare.com/romeo-and-juliet/act-2-scene-2>

As much as we love this story, we sometimes have to wonder how exactly young Romeo and Juliette fell in love? We know so little about them before the evening at the costume ball - only that their families are embroiled in a longstanding feud. But how did such a life-altering love develop as quickly as theirs? Maybe there is such a thing as love at first sight? Regardless, these two star-crossed lovers and their fateful encounter at that party led the way for a beautiful story about the power of love and the tragedy of deep-seated, generational hatred, anger, and division. While the circumstances often change, stories of a quickly arriving, life-altering love emerge throughout history. Before Romeo and Juliet there was the Song of Songs.

Last week we read from the strangest book in all the Bible (Ecclesiastes). Today - as one of you pointed out to me earlier - we read from one of the most provocative books in all the Bible. Yes, Song of Songs is a love poem - or a collection of shorter love poems - songs that do not hold back in ancient detail and a collection that confidently proclaims the power of LOVE that leaps and bounds into our lives like a Montage disguised at Capulet's costume ball, only to sweep us off our feet and change our lives forever. (That was a reference back to Romeo and Juliet).

What's fascinating though, is that in the whole book of Songs, there is no mention of God. It is one of only two books in the Bible about which this is true. Song of Songs and Esther... do not mention God.

Boy, would I love to have been a fly on the wall during the canonization process as the bishops were deciding which books would make the cut and become the collection of 66 we call the Bible today. I wish I knew their reasoning for including this one. No matter what their rationale, though, I am glad they included it... and we know the Holy Spirit must have been at work in the process because the testimony of the Song of Songs offers us a new perspective from a minority voice. This is a love song, one from the pen of a young woman in love. And hers is a song about an embodied, life-altering, mutually shared love which stands in contrast to the rest of the biblical narrative.

Most of the Bible's great love stories begin with more pragmatism than romance. This is just how it was in the ancient world. It was typical for marriages to be arranged for social gain, for the exchange of wealth, and perhaps most importantly for the integrity of the family line. With all of this to consider, who had time for love?

Ok, there is at least one love marriage in the Bible. Can you think of it? Remember Jacob and Rachel from the book of Genesis? Yes, Jacob (son of Issac, twin brother of Esau, father of the 12 nations), he fell in love with Rachel and negotiated with her father, Laban. But let us not forget that before he actually married Rachel, Laban tricked him into marrying Leah (her sister) because (and I quote)

“it [was] not the custom in this place to give the younger daughter before the firstborn,”  
(Gen. 29:26).

Isn't that just full of romance? / Can't you just feel the love? But this song (the one read today) is of no ordinary love.

In today's reading, "a young woman claims her voice, her desire, and her lover as her own. She does so proudly and poetically."<sup>2</sup> Like others before and after, the author of this love song invokes the language and imagery of nature to describe the ways love bounded into her life "like a gazelle or young stag" (v.9); the way he enlivens and awakens her senses like the spring time flowers emerging from a long cold winter (v.11-12); and the way love summons her away to join him (v.13). The song ends with a promise - a benediction of sorts: My beloved is mine and I am his... (v.16).

Can't you just hear young Juliette standing on the balcony reciting that very benediction, instead of the Shakespearean poetry penned thousands of years later? Maybe Shakespeare had spent some time reading the Song of Songs before he began to write?

If he had, he would have found himself in good company. Although we may like to avoid this book - probably because we are not quite sure what to make of it - people of faith have been losing themselves in its pages for centuries and centuries.

One of the earliest Christian historians, wrote in the first century and went by the name of Origen. Of the Song of Songs he wrote:

"Blessed is he who enters holy places, but much more blessed is he who enters 'the Holy of Holies.'  
...Likewise, blessed is he who knows holy songs and sings them... but much more blessed is he who sings 'the Song of Songs.'" (Origen, 266)

A thousand years later, Bernard of Clairvaux sees in the Songs not only a blessing but also a connection with both the church and the individual - each one captivated by the love of God bounding into and out of our lives, like a gazelle, never lingering in one place too long, and always beckoning us to leave our more stable and sensible lives behind, to throw it all away for the sake of Love.

As Clairvaux reads the Song of Songs he questions the young author wondering: What does she mean when she says, "He is for me, and I am for him?" ... "Is he the same for her as she is for him?" ... How can that be? Maybe she could explain it to us? He wonders ... or maybe the secret is for her alone?<sup>3</sup> Even as Clairvaux struggles to work out the finer mechanics of this timeless love song, we have to wonder about ourselves... Are we - the church - captivated by the love of God? Can we see it when it bounds into our lives like a young stag, a gazelle from the cliffs of yonder? Are we - the people who make up the church - equally captivated by God's love? Do we know its language and recognize its voice when it calls to us, beckoning us to come away, to chase after love, and leave more practical matters behind?

Can you imagine a world full of people, full of churches, who were captivated by the love of God? What would happen if we all allowed Love to bound into our lives and point us in a new direction? This is precisely how another medieval mystic described the spiritual journey.

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<sup>2</sup> Lisa Wolfe. *Working Preacher*.

<sup>3</sup> *Interpretation*, 36.

Teresa of Avila - known best for her writing called *The Interior Castle* describes the spiritual journey as if we are moving through different rooms of a mansion. (Remember the Johannine text: in my Father's house there are many rooms?) Each one of us - in mansions (or) lives of our own are drawn deeper and deeper into Love, which means we are drawing closer and closer to God. For Teresa - who reflected regularly on the Song of Songs - the journey of faith, the way of Love needed both devotion and embodiment. Christ has no body but mine, she writes, He prays in me, works in me, looks through my eyes, speaks through my words, works through my hands, walks with my feet, and loves with my heart. <sup>4</sup>

What if, despite the fact that God isn't mentioned in the text, the Spirit is indeed moving in the ancient Song, reminding us of all the good things God has in store? What if that is what the ancients saw in these words, this poetry, these songs... a bold and beautiful reminder of God's clandestine love for us? Love that arrived the moment God laid eyes on us? Love that ignored all the evidence pointing toward disaster... Love that was willing to risk being hurt, being judged, being broken, being betrayed... Love that insisted love itself was the only option.

What if Love itself is the good news for us today? What if we could accept that Love, and allow it to point us in a new direction? What if Love is the sum of the good news we're supposed to offer the world? What if we, like Teresa and Clairvaux, and Origen, like Romeo, like Juliette, ... like the young lover of Song 2 verses 8 - 17, what if we gave ourselves over, completely to Love?

What would happen, then??? Well I don't know, because I'm not sure that outside of fantasy and literature that it has ever been attempted. Except for in the life of Jesus Christ. You know it shouldn't be lost on us that the story of Romeo and Juliet ends with a grave, and the story of Jesus culminates at a cross. Maybe love's direction is more risky than we thought?

You know, the ancient sages used to say that the words of scripture were black letters on a white page - and that there's all that white space,<sup>5</sup> waiting to be filled in with our questions, our responses, our longings, our debates, even our doubts, and hopefully also a little bit of our wisdom.

I suppose we are simply waiting to find out - and only time will tell - if our contribution, our story, our song... was a song of Love.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://mightyishercall.com/st-teresa-of-avila-do-that-which-stirs-you-to-love/>

<sup>5</sup> Rob Bell. *Love Wins*. preface, x.