

Song of Solomon 2

Beloved

¹ I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

Lover

² Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens.

Beloved

³ Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste.

⁴ He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.

⁵ Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love.

⁶ His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me.

⁷ Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

⁸ Listen! My lover! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills.

⁹ My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice.

¹⁰ My lover spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me.

¹¹ See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone.

¹² Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land.

¹³ The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."

Lover

¹⁴ My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.

¹⁵ Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.

Beloved

¹⁶ My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies.

¹⁷ Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills.

Dearly Beloved of God:

Our text today is from a book known as the "Song of Solomon." It is also called "Song of Songs," the Hebrew way of saying "the greatest of songs." That it describes the ideal love between a husband and wife is evident. God did create male and female, saw them as "very good," and gave them the command to be fruitful and multiply. The passion we have for our spouse is a God-given gift in marriage.

There is also a theological picture in the Song. It was read every Passover in Jesus' day, and even today. Talmudic scholars ascribe the reading at Passover to the fact that God chose his people like a bridegroom chooses a bride. Jesus used images from marriage in parables he told during Passover. Paul also uses the picture of Christ and the church as an example of the ideal model for husbands and wives in Ephesians 5.

At its very heart the Song is about passion. Yes, passion between husband and wife in marriage. But also the passion God, as a bridegroom, has for His Bride—the church and its members. Today we will study:

Theme: The Passion of God Continues in Our Lives and Ministry

I. The Passion that led God to choose us.

II. The Passion that leads God to shower His love on us

III. The Passion that continues as God works through us for His Kingdom

The Passion of God that Continues in Our Lives and Ministry began with *the Passion that led God to choose us*. In tracing our religious story we start at the beginning. And that is how we learn how we came to faith. God himself chose us. Now we can debate whether we came to faith after reading the Bible, or whether our parents had us baptized, or maybe like Paul saw a vision. But the fact remains that God himself chose us regardless of how he effected that conversion. You see, Paul tells we had had no choice or power in the matter. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: ¹*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins*. He also tells us in his letter to the Ephesians: ⁴*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love* ⁵*he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will*. You see God set out to create the world and every person in it, including you and me and everyone who walks past this building and everyone who believes and everyone who curses God. He knew what we would all do. But in his Passion God made the world and each one of us anyway.

In the song that passion and delight is found in the first words spoken by the Lover: *Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens*. Notice the uniqueness God places on his bride? We may remember hearing couples relate how they met and even in a crowded room they saw each other and it was “love at first sight.” Somehow we pick out the one we love even in a crowded room. Despite our sinfulness and our flaws, God saw his Son's sacrifice as he called us to faith. There was no redeeming quality or value on our part. Simply God loved us enough to create us and to redeem us when we rebelled. He continues, as a bridegroom feeds and nurtures his bride, to feed and nurture us through his word and sacraments.

The Passion of God Continues in Our Lives and Ministry continues with *the Passion that leads God to shower His love on us*. You will notice how our Song continues: *God shades us, he brings us to a banquet and hangs a banner over us of love, he showers us with apples and raisins* (certainly a allusion to God's provision in season and out of season), *and the embrace in comfort and safety*. It is a love God showers on us daily, whether we deserve it or not, whether we are grateful or not. It is a love that caused God to give his life for us, as Paul reports in Ephesians 5 when he tells husbands how they ought to love their wives.

The Song is often referred to because of the anatomical nature of much of the poem. To be sure the Song has many references to anatomy. And while our text this morning has no such references, I believe they need to be addressed. First, the mention of anatomy is a listing of the physical features

that a man and a wife would find desirable. That there are some cultural biases is evident. Not many of us would tell our wives that her hair is like goats. Many commentators have offered varying ideas on this description. But as we read through the anatomical references we see they are addressed in respectful and positive terms. And in God's eyes the church is a positively beautiful bride—all aspects of the bride are beautiful. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12, he speaks of the church being one body with many parts and how the whole of the body is greater than the sum of its parts. Not one of us here this morning is greater or less than another part of the body. Each one of us is a part of the body of Christ. God sees each one of us as beautiful and vital to His Mission. This is the banner of love at the banquet—a banner that yells: “This is my Bride,” much like Pastor Phil speaks of his wife as “My beautiful bride, Pam.”

The other aspect of the anatomical references is one of comfort. Very few of us feel comfortable disrobed. This is a state we only feel comfortable in when we trust the person with whom we become so intimate. One needs to feel safe and secure and not be judged. In God's presence we can be awed. We might even want to tighten our cloak around our collar. But God comes to us, sinners that we are, and washes us clean in His Son's blood. Because Jesus paid the price for our sins those sins no longer stand between God and us. Remember what happened when Adam and Eve sinned? They saw that they were naked, were ashamed, and wove clothes of fig leaves. They couldn't even stand to be naked before the God who had intimately and intricately created each one of them!

But God called us out of darkness. He rescued us from our sin. He chose us to be his children and to live with him for all eternity. Yet, here we are in the here and now. So, why doesn't God call us home now or call a halt to the whole world? Because there are “other sheep not yet of this fold” as Jesus said. We are called by God not only to live and be in his presence, but God wants us to go forth and share our faith and hope with the world around us. ***The Passion of God Continues in Our Lives and Ministry as a Passion that continues as God works through us for His Kingdom.***

The Song speaks of the time that has come.

See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."

The winter is closing and spring is coming. Normally Scripture gives us the picture of a harvest, which we associate with Fall. But winter's end and spring's beginning hints at a new birth, a regeneration from death to life. And in the same way that God gives us rebirth he sends us out in the spring to share that rebirth and bring rebirth to those still in winter's throes. This rebirth brings new life, new songs, and new fruit and fragrances. Isn't life a beautiful and intoxicating scent with our Lord?

Not that the rebirth and new spring is easy. We read of the troubles the Song testifies to:

The Lover says: *My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.*

We see foxes who come to damage the vineyard, the quiet place of sanctuary for the couple. In our marriages we have struggles, don't we? We are two unique persons combined as one in the

institution God blessed us with. Often the outside world guides us to God-displeasing attitudes about marriage, whether it is the assertion of rights or the seeking of personal pleasures. Our lives as Christians likewise is filled with foxes seeking to destroy the vineyards. Satan continues an assault of temptation against us as he seeks to recapture us. Becoming Christian does not mean troubles will flee; in fact, they multiply. Jesus did not promise prosperity and comfort; he warned that we would carry his cross. But despite these trials our Lover-God still wants to hear our voices! Broken and contrite hearts offer the most beautiful praise to our Bridegroom.

The Beloved asserts her devotion to her Lover: *My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies*. Who else can help the Bride, but her Bridegroom? She goes on to relay the sense of security as she repeats a sentiment voiced earlier in the chapter: *Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills*. Earlier the Beloved noticed her Lover standing guard like a stag stands guard over his doe. This latest verse completes the thought—the Bridegroom not only stands guard but also actively seeks help for his Beloved. Our God is living and active in our very lives, not just a God who watches over us from afar.

We at Salem may feel that God's Passion is waning. We count the number of bodies here among us this morning and wonder why God doesn't fill our pews. We may see the few that volunteer at any given event and become more discouraged by what we perceive as a lack of willingness and less joyful about the opportunities God has placed before us. Just on a Sunday morning before worship starts we'll have some people studying the Bible in Bible class, children in Sunday school, a small prayer group in another room, and the choir practicing in the balcony. It is all too easy to be dismayed by the small numbers of any one group. But take the numbers as a whole and now you have some real ministry going on!

And perhaps we may sense that God isn't helping us carry out his ministry. Perhaps our ministries are more high maintenance than we first thought. Or we had expectations from those ministries. We seem discouraged. We seem to have lost any passion.

And I suspect we have learned why very few are carrying out the ministries we have attempted at Salem. It is tough work, it is sacrificial work, it is not glamorous work, and we don't always see bountiful results.

We need to review God's passion for us. At the back of the altar we have a reminder of that passion. We call it a representation of the Passion of Christ. Our Lord went to the cross and died for all our sins. As a creator of the human body he knew the pain he was in for when he went to the cross. But his love for us was so deep and so profound that he willingly gave his life so we can live with him for all eternity. He sought to restore that old relationship he had with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

God did this without having any guarantees. There was no guarantee any of us would come to faith. And even when we do come to faith we are still high maintenance. We read from and study his love letter, the Bible. In it we see how God maintained his relationship with us—dying for our sins, taking the time to point out our sins, disciplining us as dear children (not punishing us as we deserve), and time after time assuring us of his love and his contract to buy us back from sin with his blood. We are often tempted to say “Those people...,” which creates a divide. God could easily have turned his back on us with the explanation “Those people can't do anything for themselves and are only looking out for themselves.” And God would be right if he said that. But God didn't turn his back on us. He

has a love and a passion for each one of us.

Let us then fix our eyes on Jesus, the absolute expression of God's passion for us. May God instill a portion of that passion in us as we seek to carry out His Mission to those whom he calls us to serve—Sunday mornings, Friday nights, Wednesday and Thursday nights, in our neighborhood walks, as we work throughout the week, as we live and grow as families. In all that we do, we do to God's glory. We seek to reflect the Passion of God, *A passion that led God to choose us, to shower His love on us, and a Passion that we reflect in our Kingdom work.*

Amen