

*Based on Song of Songs 2:8-13. The Song of the Lover, the Beloved, and the Love That Binds Them*

What is this longing?

For companionship. For love. For wholeness.

For deep, intimate, knowing—with all that we are—that we might also be known, fully, in return?

The cynic might say it is the propagation of the species: a mechanism for germ plasm to pass on to the next generation that drives us into each other's arms. The Puritan might say it is sin: a desire of the flesh that dare not speak its name in polite society. The psychologist might say it is working out our unresolved family of origin issues by projecting them onto another human being.

But the mystic would say it is a *holy* longing. For intimate union with God and with one another. Built into the very fabric of our creation. From the beginning of time until the end. A divine dance that melds us into the wholeness of the universe, where we really are already “one,” even though we do not always feel like it.

Believe it or not, our biblical texts say so too. Especially in the unabashed blessing of the passionate pursuit of physical love that is celebrated in the Song of Solomon.

The Hebrew title for this text is *shir hashirim*. Which is somewhat difficult to translate because it is a superlative, and we do not have a construction in English to express it the same way. And so we say “The Song of Songs.” Or “The Song of Solomon.” But it is really something more like “*The Most Amazing Song ... There Ever Was ... Ever Sung ... Ever in the Universe ... Ever!*”

In fact, the biblical tradition in Judaism reveres this song so highly that one of the great historic commentaries on the text says, “All the world is not worth the day that the Song of Songs was given to Israel.”

*“All the world is not worth the day that the Song of Songs was given to us!”*

That is high praise for a book of the Bible that most people have never read.

But we should. Because The Song of Songs is an unabashed, unashamed, pure and passionate full-scale, full-throated, full-body pursuit of human love and mutual companionship and tenderness and joy. With someone whose entire being—body and soul—matches yours.

Even during COVID, the pursuit of human love and mutual companionship has been at an all time high, with online instructions galore for singles seeking safety while dating through this global pandemic: The *Washington Post Magazine* shares weekly spotlights on Love in the Time of COVID. American University Radio recently released a podcast on “Daring to Date During the Delta Variant.”

The number one relationship reminder in all of these online instructions, for both singles and attached? *Give yourselves some extra grace right now. This is a hard time. You might not get it all right.*

Which is good advice for any time. And good advice for any relationship ... not just the ones that send us all a-twitter at the voice of our Beloved.

*Give yourselves some extra grace right now. This is a hard time. You might not get it all right.*

The apostle Paul says it this way: Love is patient; love is kind; love is not irritable or resentful; love bears all things; love endures all things.

Paul is speaking, of course, in this beloved text from First Corinthians, to the *church!* To life in *community*. Which is highly ironic, given the prevalence of this Scripture at weddings. Fascinating, is it not, that the Lesson in the Bible that is so clearly about love in community is spoken at weddings, while the Lesson in the Bible that is so clearly about love in romantic relationships is dismissed as allegory?

Biblical scholars remind us that the Greek language of the New Testament used in First Corinthians makes clear distinctions between these different kinds of love: *eros* for romantic love; *filios* for love among siblings and friends; *agape* for the love of God and the kind of love Paul wants us to share in our spiritual community. But in Hebrew, as in English, there is only one word for love: *ahavah*. And in Hebrew, unlike English, there is no separation of body and soul, no distinction between a so-called “higher love” accorded to God and the communion of saints being more important than a “lesser love” accorded to a romantic partner or a family member or a neighbor or a friend. Or even, in the teachings of Jesus, accorded to an enemy.

It is all one love in the Song of Songs.

It is an active love; it is an embodied love. It is a love that withstands criticism and jealousy. It is a love that protects and defends, even as it entices and enjoys. It is a love that remains faithful in the face of difficulty.

And it is a love that challenges racism and economic disparity. The lovers in the Song of Solomon are not of the same social class—their love is challenged and rejected by many. But even so, their love will not stop seeking the good of the other *and* the good of the self. Their love will not stop *celebrating* the goodness of the other and the goodness of the self. Their love, in the end, inspires the entire city to transform itself into a community of justice and peace, in order to receive their love. Not unlike those lovers of justice marching in the footsteps of Martin Luther King, Jr, this weekend, calling upon our country to enact voting rights reform *fifty years after* we thought we had fixed this fundamental threat to our democracy.

This “one love” we experience through human love and mutual companionship is, as our tradition says, “a gift from God for the well-being of the entire human family.” When people come together, in covenant commitment, they show us all how to care for one another, how to challenge one another, how to keep on getting along. Even when—and especially when—we are *really* struggling to “get along”!

Human love in mutual companionship, both in romantic partnership and in spiritual community, is a “taste,” we say, of that heavenly banquet that is yet to come in the fullness of time when our *baptismal* covenant is finally made complete. And we know no longer the deep walls of race and gender and economic inequality and social injustice that keep us from “being one,” in our Self-Inflicted-Nonsense.

And that, in the end, is what this longing for companionship, for love, for wholeness, for deep intimate knowing, with all that we are, that we might also be known, fully, in return, is really all about: *The Love That Wilt Not Ever Let Us Go*.

Because it is the steadfast, never-ending, never-failing love of *God*—finally and forever—that keeps on leaping upon the mountains and bounding over the hills for *us*, in this “Song of Most Excellent Songs.” Peeking through the lattice we build up around our hearts. Breaking through our walls. Day after day. Night after night. Calling us ever deeper into the Beloved Community that is the ultimate reign of God.

And because *we* are the ones whom *God* has joined in our baptism, with all of creation, nothing can ever separate us!

Let the church say, Amen!