

Journeys of Love

August 29, 2021 - Lectionary 22, Year B - Song of Solomon 2:8-13, Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from Christ Jesus our Lord who journeys with us in love. Amen.

Have you ever seen one of those soldier reunion videos on TV or the internet? You know the ones where a military person has been away from home for a long time, and they get to surprise their family: their spouse, their children, maybe even their pets?

I love those videos.

The pure, unguarded, vulnerable joy that you see when someone gets to see a loved one for the first time in however many months, or even years. It's beautiful. And it's a whole body experience as people run across airport lobbies, or break down in tears on the front steps of their home, or dogs just can't stop wriggling with excitement. Sometimes, when I'm in a bad mood, I watch a few of those sorts of videos just for the pick-me-up.

But the thing is, with those videos, you rarely get to see what happens next. You get to see the joyful moment of reunion, but the cameras are rarely rolling for the ride home, for those next few hours that I'm certain are just as joyful. And maybe even the rest of their lives, as their love for their missed loved one grows ever stronger.

Sometimes I think I'd want to see that even more.

Today, we hear from the Song of Solomon as our first reading from the Old Testament as part of the semi-continuous series. Over the summer we've heard stories about the great early kings of Israel: Saul, David, and Solomon, and now we shift gears just a bit. The Song of Solomon is not a story, at least not in the same sense of the stories we've been hearing.

Song of Solomon is a *love* story. A *love poem*. No one's quite sure who first wrote it, but obviously, they were madly and passionately in love. Some say it might have been written by one of Solomon's first wives, or by Solomon himself. But its presence in the canon of scripture is a result of the way it's been interpreted throughout history.

The Israelites read it as a confession of love between God and the people of Israel. And later, the early Christians saw it in much the same way, but rather representing the relationship between Christ and the church.

When you hear the opening lines of today's reading, "Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills." Don't you almost want to imagine the sort of joyful reunion between a soldier returning home after a deployment to their spouse? Or their children? Or dog? Or maybe, it conjures up memories of the end of the story of the prodigal son, where the father runs across the field to greet the son he thought he had lost.

Pure, unguarded, vulnerable joy. The kind that can only come along with pure, unconditional love.

But just like those reunion videos, my curiosity leads me to question, what happens next? What happens after the camera crew goes home. And the Song of Solomon gives us that answer, too...

"My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;"

"Come away." Those two words can be found in so many love songs. Because love is not just about that one moment of joy, but the journey that you share together. How you live out your love each and every day of your life.

And believe it or not, the story we hear of Jesus in today's Gospel says just as much...

We're coming back into the Gospel of Mark on the heels of the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on water. He has ruffled feathers and the Pharisees are already up in arms when they see his disciples eating with unclean hands. HOW DARE THEY!?! They're not following Jewish law, they are defiling their entire bodies!

And Jesus turns around and calls the Pharisees hypocrites.

Because he knows that they don't love God as much as they love rules. They don't love God as much as they love being in power, being in control.

The reason I would want to see the "after" of those reunion videos is because I know that those couples, those families, are just as loving behind the scenes and in the journey after as they are in their moment in the spotlight.

The same cannot be said for the Pharisees. Their love for the Lord is only skin-deep. When no one is watching, they're just as wicked as the rest of us.

But that's the thing. All of us are in need of God's redemptive love. And God doesn't give us rules to chain us down. God shows God's love in hopes that we might be inspired by it and pass it on to others.

God comes to us like a beloved family member, and says "come away with me." It doesn't matter what happened the minute before, or the month before, God welcomes us home. And it's not that single solitary moment that's important. It's not the joy of being welcome home. But rather, the endless love for which the reunion is just the beginning. Amen.