

How Does God's Love Come to Us?

29 August 2021

St Peter's during Lockdown.

Reading: Song of Songs 2:8-13.

Let us pray...

Faithful God please open the Scriptures to us in a fresh and exciting way.

In Jesus name.

Well-done everyone for making it this far through lockdown. If you haven't joined the dog in chewing the furniture you are doing well. The nail salons, hair salons, waxing centres and tanning places are all closed. So, it's about to get ugly out there!

In meditating on the readings for today I was drawn to the first. It must be among the most beautiful in all of Scripture. In fact, I reckon it's among the most beautiful in all human literature. Listen again to what the beloved says to his beloved.

"Arise my love my fair one and come away, for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs and the vines are in blossom; they give forth their fragrance."

The Songs of Songs where this reading comes from is an Old Testament book that is as unique as it is beautiful. It's unique because the voice of a woman makes up most of the book. Over 75% is her voice. Her story rather than his story.

It's unusual because it makes no mention of God. Or does it?

And today is the only time we read from it in our three-year series of readings.

Many commentators have written much about it. I think it answers one of the most basic of human questions. How does God's love come to us?

How, in the middle of a lockdown, does God's love come to us? How, in the middle of a global pandemic, does God's love come to us? How, in the midst of tension and fighting overseas, does God's love come to us?

It's all very well for priests and pastors to speak of God's love but how does it show itself?

In five short verses The Song of Songs offers us three answers.

Firstly, God's love is shown to us through other people. Whether we live alone or with others, whether we are married or single, we experience God's love on a daily basis through the love of other people.

Unashamedly the Song of Songs speaks of an intimate relationship between a man and a woman, and this is most definitely to be celebrated and enjoyed. But all interaction with others can be a source of love and loyalty. As I wrote this the man driving the wheelie bin truck stopped and got out. He had seen some rubbish in the gutter. He cleaned it up and drove on. It's not his job but he showed love by doing it. Lockdown serves to highlight how dependant we are on those we often take for granted: supermarket workers, nurses and doctors, the people that keep the sewage working

and the electricity, the scientist in the back room brewing up vaccines and the childcare workers, the rest home workers and the truck drivers. We are created to need other people and we see God's love in and through others.

The Song of Songs answers the question *how do we see the love of God* in a second way. In Creation. God, out of Love, created this world to be our home. Rita Snowden, a Methodist from Nelson wrote:

*“God’s world is conceived in hope,
dawn follows darkness,
Spring follows the leaf-strewn way of Winter,
the world is born anew in every child
the resurrection lies just beyond what we call death”*

We have just enjoyed the most magnificent Spring weather; the trees are bursting with blossom and the garden is alive with daffodils and the like. In the Vicarage garden are three butterflies who spend the day zooming around and an owl calls to us each morning. The writer of the Song of Songs sees God's love in the beauty and the faithfulness of God's creation.

A third way the Song of Songs sees the love of God is that it is like the intimacy of a man and woman very much in love. We see this passionate love that God has for the world supremely in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The good news is that Jesus is alive today, we can also know him in the here and now. In a living intimate relationship with Jesus, we discover God's love for us. To discover the love that God has for us is to discover the secret at the heart of the universe. God's love. *“The essence of prayer,”* writes Ruth Burrows, *“is to let ourselves be loved, to let ourselves be given to, to let ourselves be worked upon by this great God and made capable of total union with God.”*

Prayer then is best understood as allowing ourselves to be loved by God in the present moment.

The Song of Songs answers the question *how does God's love come to us*, but it doesn't stop there. It goes on to tell us how strong this love we find in God is.

Set beautifully to music by David Childs and sung beautifully by our choir a few weeks ago, are the words of the Song of Songs 8:6

“For love is as strong as death, many waters cannot quench love, neither floods drown it, for love is as strong as the grave. “

How in the middle of a lockdown does God's love come to us? How in the middle of a global pandemic does God's love come to us? How in the midst of tension and fighting overseas does God's love come to us?

God's love comes to us through others, God's love comes to us in the Spring creation, God's love comes to us in a life-giving relationship with Jesus.

And God's love is stronger than any kind of death, even and most especially COVID 19.