

SERMON: “The Book of Love....”

Rev. Geoff Ross: St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton, Sunday, Feb 11, 2018

[Songs – wedding song/BofL “*The Book of Love is long and boring and written very long ago. It’s full of flowers and heart-shaped boxes, and things we’re all too young to know.*” – the Bible is God’s Word: filled with promises of love]

When I conduct weddings, I stand here in front and speak of love to a couple/two people as they exchange their vows and commit themselves to each other. While I much prefer the rehearsals – mainly for their spontaneity – there’s one thing that I never get tired of: watching the groom watch his bride come down the aisle. There’s an openness to the look of unabashed love/joy/delight – especially since just moments before I usually see the groom nervously pacing the Church as he ponders what he’s about to commit himself to. Love – and giving oneself to another – is like that: one minute you’re nervous and uncertain, the next you’re a grinning deer in the headlights of life.

While I like the openness of that moment, as a society we’re uncomfortable with the power of love. Paradoxically, we live in a culture that uses sex to sell everything from soap to cars, yet we frown on public displays of affection – not because we’re inured or jaded, but because it’s too real and honest; too revelatory and open. Love – and being in love – is like that: the fact that love is giving of herself to you, is walking toward you, overwhelms you as you find yourself giving yourself to her. And faith is like this, too.

The reading we heard this morning from Isaiah we heard God’s profession of love for us – deep/profound/complete – with a knowledge – intimate – and language and imagery physical/personal – but this language isn’t restricted to Isaiah; it is throughout the whole Bible. As Bruce mentioned in the introduction to the reading, the word “love” is used over 600 times in the Bible – in both the Old/New Testament – to describe not only the emotion but a covenantal relationship between two people – like a marriage in which two people commit/submit themselves to it, and to each other. To truly love we must love and forgive, we must sacrifice ourselves for love. The love that we know in God through Jesus – the gift of love that is grace – compels us to be more loving in return. [Paul: “*outdo in honour*”(Rmn) – love not about us/needs/wants but of other/s n/w/d. Love: do a lot – *bears/believes/hopes all things*: giving freely/openly – *endure all things*.(1Cor13)]

Nowhere in the Bible do we hear about this love more passionately than in the Song of Solomon – a collection of wedding/fertility songs that contains some of the most beautiful and evocative poetry in the Bible that, in metaphorical/graphic/sensual language depicts the physical/spiritual nature of love/faith. In impassioned/Epicurean language the Song of Solomon offers us an intimate expression of faith: faith as a love that changes everything, as a passionate commitment that is total/complete, as a relationship that reciprocates love for love received. Faith should be as profound as anything else in our lives; vital and active, it should be as strong and complete as love.

[Wedding course: you know/you know; no plan B – how met stories – Love songs]

The Bible – this Book of Love – is a love song between God and His creation/us: God created us out of love for/to love for God and love for each other, a love through which we truly experience what it means to love/be loved. Jesus is the Beloved whose love enables us to love others/in return. He is the One we long for/love – the One whose love can save/redeem/restore us/sets us free – whose love makes us want to be better people/moves us beyond ourselves to fulfill our potential as loving children of a loving God. The love of God is a gift that changes everything! What a gift! What a blessing! What Good News! – And trust me, we need to hear some good news! – news about a love that never fails/ends. The love song we heard this morning tells us that the Beloved – Jesus – is there, standing by the wall, longing/looking for and calling out to us

And when my Beloved speaks, my beloved speaks things alive, of things fruitful, intimate, trusted: dear. My beloved speaks of desire, of longing, of hunger and appetites sated and satisfied. My Beloved speaks of courtship – of the calling and offering and giving of love promised – my Beloved speaks to me of intimacy and relationship – of love fulfilled. My Beloved speaks of paradise – of garden/kingdom, of earth/heaven, of things as they are and things to come – my Beloved speaks to me of the expansiveness of His love, of His heart, of His fidelity and faithfulness. Excited, we hear His voice, and respond. Excited, we listen and reach out, giving ourselves to him. My Beloved speaks *"Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."* – and we – you/I – are his.

Thanks be to God by whose love, for love we were made. Amen.