

02.18.24

“All We Need Is Love!”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Song of Solomon 2:8-13; 6:1-3 (NIV)

⁸ Listen! My beloved!

Look! Here he comes,
leaping across the mountains,
bounding over the hills.

⁹ My beloved 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 beloved spoke and said to me,

“Arise, my darling,
my beautiful one, 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.”

6¹ Where has your beloved gone,
most beautiful of women?

Which way did your beloved turn,
that we may look for him with you?

² My beloved has gone down to his garden,

to the beds of spices,
to browse in the gardens
and to gather lilies.

³ I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine;

he browses among the lilies.

Leader: These are Words of Love for the People of God!

All: Thanks be to God!

Matthew 17:1-9 (NLT)

¹ Six days later Jesus took Peter and the two brothers, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. ² As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light. ³ Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus.

⁴ Peter exclaimed, “Lord, it’s wonderful for us to be here! If you want, I’ll make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

⁵ But even as he spoke, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him.” ⁶ The disciples were terrified and fell face down on the ground.

⁷ Then Jesus came over and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” ⁸ And when they looked up, Moses and Elijah were gone, and they saw only Jesus.

⁹ As they went back down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

Leader: These Words Are of God. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Creator God, we thank you for this day of Bible Study, worship, and fellowship. The music, imagery, and Scripture inspire us to love more. May we find beauty in all we experience today as we draw closer to you, our loved ones, and to each other as siblings in Christ. Help us to understand your Word and apply it to our ministries and personal lives. May this message deepen our journey into beauty. Speak to us this morning in your Words and your voice through this servant messenger. Amen.

Happy post-Valentine’s Day! I hope yours was a day of sweet memories. Did you see on last week’s news that on February 9, 1964, the Beatles landed in America for the first time and played on the Ed Sullivan Show? In honor of this 60th anniversary, I bring to your attention a relevant song they played in June 25, 1967, on “Our World”, the first live **global** television link: “All You Need Is Love” was written by John Lennon and credited to Lennon-McCartney. It was watched by 400 million people in 26 countries and broadcast via satellite. This was written about a relationship (remember, “she loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah?”), but a war was also going on then as two are now. Love is all we need now!

Also, may I wish you the Loving Peace of the Lenten season, a liminal space/time for contemplation, discipline, and reflection, preparing us for Palm Sunday, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Easter. We

will be having a Good Friday lunch, communion, and service of music and scripture again this year. Hope you'll come at noon. Pastor Ed's church will host a sunrise service, and we may have some sort of fellowship, but we are still working that out.

I wonder if John Lennon knew he was writing a Biblical song and title. Our only two commandments are to love God and love neighbor, so even Scripture tells us "All You Need Is Love!" Our first passage is another type of song—also poetry—attributed to King Solomon, with Solomon perhaps typifying Christ and "the beloved" he writes of being the church. Although it is not the majority interpretive opinion, it is interesting. Song of Solomon is sometimes called Song of Songs, and it is a lyric poem, possibly a collection of Syrian wedding songs. The book's purpose is to commend love and marriage, even though King Solomon eventually had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Most say it was written early in his reign between 971 and 931 BC shortly after his first marriage, and he was truly in love with her and she with him.

The Hebrew people respected Song of Songs highly and portions of it were sung or recited at Passover on the eighth day, but because the sensuous imagery described the joys of passionate lovers, a Jewish man could not read it until he was thirty years of age! Their longing and desire for one another intensifies into intimacy in poetic detail.

Now, the setting moves from a royal one in the capital out to the country. Solomon is described as attractive and athletic like a gazelle or a young stag, a stealthy forager seeking his beloved. He falls in love with her beauty as one looks forward to the beautiful blossoming of spring flowers, the rains, and luscious fruit. Remember that they lived in a

desert, and had just come through a harsh winter, so the spring rains would be welcome.

Of course, we also find beauty in the romantic tone of *eros* and first love, but the second Songs section points to the beauty of a mature and complete marriage, where there is *agape* love despite any distance or perceived separation. The emotional distance which happens sometimes in any marriage is overcome in these last three verses. She knew right where her husband was, without any words, in his garden! And the poet writes figuratively that forgiveness for any wrongdoing would be given. I'm not here today to teach you about marriage; but without love, any relationship is threatened personally or in community. I am here to remind you that many kinds of love exist in your life. Valentine's Day for some is a lonely, difficult day, but because of generous and hospitable people like Phyllis, our co-laborers, dear friends or family, and Pastor Ed Young's church, we can all celebrate the joys of being appreciated during Valentine's week! Each of us has had or has now a great love in our lives, so when life goes sour instead of sweet, that love needs to be remembered—not for wallowing in grief or disappointment, but to recall the joy and satisfaction of filling another's need for reciprocal love.

Lent is a time for contemplation and reflection, so as we read the little booklet with daily reflections (*be sure you got one*), let's remember that we have a great capacity for kindness and love. As believers of course, our one true love is Jesus! Although there is no mention of Song of Songs in the Greek Scriptures of the New Testament, scholars do admire the subtle literary allusions to the triune God in this poetry, similar to prophetic and wisdom writings. This was one of my learnings from

preparing this lesson. Listen to these words as words that might have been spoken to Mary when the women arrived at the empty tomb:

6¹ Where has your beloved gone,
 most beautiful of women?
 Which way did your beloved turn,
 that we may look for him with you?
 2 My beloved has gone down to his garden,
 to the beds of spices,
 to browse in the gardens
 and to gather lilies.
 3 I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine;
 he browses among the lilies.

The tomb in Israel does rest in a garden, and the women used spiced herbs for his burial there.

“*Christ is mine and I am his*” is the first line of an old Primitive Baptist hymn that inverts the line but is similar to verse 3. We sing of its meaning in our Baptist hymn, “In the Garden.” That hymn was written about the empty tomb when Mary meets a man who she thinks is the gardener, and then with love, he speaks her name and she recognizes him, saying “Rabboni!”

From our third passage, I imagine that the disciples who followed Jesus up the mountain and experienced the Transfiguration felt the same way when they witnessed the three greats of Hebrew history together: Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Peter, James, and John had a reaction of fear at first; only when Jesus reminded them of his transcendent love did they rise in courage. This became an anointing of sorts; a life changing moment of belief to be so loved by Jesus that they would witness his divine glory! It must have been a lot to take in, yet the experience fueled their ministry and obedience forevermore. Building tents was not the

generous gift God required; only love was and is. “Love is all we need!” Love transcends all time and barriers. This is the connection for us this Valentine’s week and the first week of Lent. Ash Wednesday litanies tell us to **prepare** for the unthinkable loss of our beloved ones in death and in resurrection. But how? “All We Need Is Love!” Can you imagine and practice both giving and receiving **more** *agape* love? Especially before Jesus comes again. I hope so! “We love because he first loved us.” Amen!

|| **Let us pray.**

Loving God, we thank you for the beauty of your creation and for your transcendent love. We are especially grateful that you sent your son, Jesus, to help and save us from our sin. Thank you too for those humans you gave us to love and for those who love us unconditionally. May we be aware of their love and more generous with our own. Let us not only speak the words of love but demonstrate the actions of love that the Scriptures teach us. In Jesus’ name we pray, **Amen.**