

July 9, 2023

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost / Proper 9

Meditation: "Love"

What kind of writing was that? (Song of Songs 2:8-13)

Treatise? Essay? Contract? Novel? Poetry?

What kind of poetry?

Haiku? Limerick? Acrostic? Sonnet?

It's love poetry, erotic love poetry to be precise because it portrays scenes of actual and imagined trysts between the poem's female protagonist and her lover.

So why is this in the Bible?

Who decided what was included in the Bible and what wasn't, and when? Well, as to who, it was the bishops of the day, people like Ambrose and Augustine, Gregory and Jerome. As to when, that's a little more complicated. The council of Hippo, held in 393, and the council of Carthage, held in 397, set what they called the definitive collection of holy texts that comprised the canon of Holy Scripture. Augustine was present at both of those councils.

The bishops at those councils considered the canon as closed. In truth, the canon was not confirmed within the Roman Catholic church until the council of Trent, held in 1546. The Anglican church confirmed what they considered canonical in 1563 with the 39 Articles, the Calvinists confirmed what they considered canonical with the Westminster Confession in 1647, and the Eastern Orthodox church confirmed what they considered canonical at the Synod of Jerusalem, held in 1672. That is only about 350 years ago, and over 1600 years after the death of Jesus. Does any of that surprise you?

The Song of Songs, or the Song of Solomon, or the Canticle of Canticles, often shortened just to the Canticles, was one book that was controversial, both with the Rabbis working to canonize Jewish sacred texts, and the Bishops working to canonize Christian sacred texts. I mean, it was, after all, a book of erotic love poetry. There were many books that did not make it into the canon, like the book of Jasher, the book of Jehu, the acts of Uziah, Gad the Seer, Nathan the Prophet, and many others in the Old Testament, and the book of Enoch, the epistle to the Laodiceans, the Life of Adam and Eve, the Shepherd of Hermas, and others in the New Testament. So why was the Song of Songs included in the Biblical canon? What do you think? Any ideas?

Ultimately, the Rabbis and the Bishops chose to view the book as an allegory of the love story between God and God's chosen ones, or between Christ and the Church.

*Look, there he stands behind our wall,
gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice*

God, far from being a distant and disinterested creator, as some view God, is right by our side, looking in at the windows of our lives, and inviting us into a relationship with God.

My beloved speaks and says to me:

"Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

God is imminent, and waiting for our response. Will we go with God, enter into a lifelong committed relationship with God, or will we spurn God? In spite of God's overwhelming desire to be in relationship with us, God gives us that choice. What love, what love! How will you, as an individual, respond? How will you, as a worshipping community, respond? The choice is yours.