

## **Sermon 31<sup>st</sup> Jan 2010 (Song of Songs 2:8-3:5) “Songs of commitment”**

This is our second week on the Song of Songs – and we’re talking about romance and marriage.

Now, I realise that there’s a danger with sermons on specific themes like this, and the danger is that they are not always relevant to everyone.

If you’re single, you might think “a sermon on marriage has nothing to say to me”

If you’re married, you might think “a sermon on romance has nothing to say to me!”

(Although, given we are ending this series on February 14<sup>th</sup>, there will be no excuse this year guys.)

Seriously, though, some who are not married and have no intention of marrying, might not think this helps them.

But, we’ve just been hearing about homelessness, and I am not homeless. So, I listen not because it is “about me” but because, as a Christian, I care about homeless people. So, if you are not married, bear with us, because the married need to hear this.

Scripture has very specific things to say to married people and to single people, to divorced people, and to widowed people. (Indeed, I spent 2 years with the Church’s sexuality group studying singleness – so that not a topic to be ignored, and we must return to it some time, not least because Jesus was single.)

So, we’re back in the poetry of the Song of Songs.

A boy running, shouting, leaping over mountains, a boy in love.

A girl, singing about her boy – he’s a gazelle to her. He’s a young stag. She loves him.

And it is spring.

(There’s something poetic about love and spring, even a philandering misogynist like Robbie Burns noticed it: “my love is like a red, red, rose that’s newly sprung in spring,”)

So, here we have love, desire, emotion, enthusiasm, and .... the Bible loves it.

Scripture come to it, not with moralising rules, not with negativity, but with poetry, song and celebration (we saw this last week too).

The lover comes to the girl’s parental home (v.9)

He stands behind the wall, gazing through the window, looking through the lattice.

(No, he’s not a stalker!)

He’s come with a proposal (v10) “Arise my love and come away with me.”

It is beautiful indeed@

Love, desire, beauty and poetry:

and now a choice – a decision to be made.

Will she stay or will she go?

Will she take the life changing-plunge?

He’s asked her out, and it’s not for coffee at Starbucks.

This is the big one: will he give herself to her?

Here is true love in Biblical perspective.

It is beautiful, poetic and positive.

It is not irresponsible, transient or shallow.

The choice here is for commitment, for consequence, for life and love.

Our society is so obsessed with sex, relationships and romance,  
but the problem is that the world just doesn't take it seriously enough:

Celebrity marriages that last for 20 hours.

Soap operas where the partners change every few months

all drift in and out of relationships

with casual sex (and there is nothing casual about sex)

experimental living

changing minds

breaking vows

living together for just a few months.

And Scriptures message is that all that is deeply *unromantic* – that is not the way we are made, and it just doesn't work.

True love – true sex – true relationships are always about deep costly commitment,

because true love is based on God's love for us – and that is all about commitment, faithfulness and endurance.

And now, our girl has to make her commitment.

And she does.

And it is in this lovely verse "My beloved is mine, and I am his"

They are committed to each other – they give themselves to each other.

"He is mine, I am his; we are one".

This echoes Genesis 2:24

*"therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh."*

And, in the Genesis story, the two are then together naked and unashamed

It is beautiful and it is romantic – serious stuff.

The man moves out – the man moves in – and a new unit is formed.

Key here is *Song 2:16* "my beloved is mine, and I am his"

She fully surrenders herself to him – and he gives himself to her and they are one.

Notice she does not say

"I am his, so he can do what he wants with me, he can take me when he wants"

She says

"he is mine, he gives his heart to me, and therefore I give myself to him because he loved me first"

And this again echoes God's love – we are able to love him because he loved us first.

So, husband and wife are to be given to each other.

Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 5:22

Where he says "wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord"

That is the wife is to treat her husband as if he were Jesus.

She is to love him, honour him, serve him, put him first.

Now, before get shot by the feminists,  
we need to read the next thing Paul says in Ephesians 5 (5:25)  
“husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her”  
Husbands, she is to treat you like she would Jesus  
and you are to behave to her as if you were Jesus.  
That is you are to serve her, love her, put her first, wash her feet, and be willing to die for her.  
And that puts a very different gloss on the command for wives to submit to husbands.

“He is mine, I am his, we are one.”

Biblical marriage gives to each other, submits to each other, sacrifices for each other.

Marriages go wrong where one party does all the taking, and demands that the other party do all the sacrificing and submitting.

That’s not marriage, that’s abuse.

And unfortunately, sometimes the Church has been guilty of telling wives to submit, forgetting to tell husbands to love like Jesus, and in the process the Church has been guilty of condoning abuse.

All of our relationships are to model Jesus to each other.

All of our relationships are to reflect God’s love for us.

But marriage in a very special and particular way.

the passage from Ephesians 5 begins by saying all of us are to “submit to each other”.

And that’s hard.

It is hard if you are married to a Christian and it perhaps harder if you are not.

Most marriages, in my opinion, have two fundamental problems:

one is the wife

the other is the husband.

So many romance movies end implying that they live “happily ever after”

and it is forgotten that two sinners just moved in together, and so they are going to get it wrong.

And the Bible, even in all the celebration and romance of the Song of Songs, does not forget the difficulties.

2:15 refers to “little foxes” running in the vineyard.

Now, this is one of these wonderful bits of Scripture that preachers find wonderful

because it is not clear what it means, which means the preacher can interpret it different ways.

Picture it, the garden, a perfect vineyard, but full of pests – little foxes.

And there is a need to grab those little foxes before they become big foxes.

And marriage is sometimes like a garden with little its little foxes (and I don’t mean the kids)

It has its problems – and its unwelcome intruders.

These can be jealousy, bitterness, critical spirits, an inability to forgive, or a lack of time.

These little foxes need to be grabbed.

And then, in 3:1-5, we have a second image – an image of fear.

The woman screams in the night with a bad dream.

In her dream, he has deserted her.

She wakes, but he is gone.  
He's not there, she panics and screams,  
and runs like a banshee through the night crying "have you seen him?"  
It is a dream of despair.

It is just a nightmare, but it indicates a risk.  
If you love, you are vulnerable.  
If you love, you can lose.  
You can be hurt, let down, left alone.

So, this song celebrates love – but does not hide the difficulties.  
There are bad dreams, fears, foxes and disasters.  
There is pain, loss and realism.  
All relationships face this; it is part of being human.  
And the church has a duty to be an honest community where we can hold the pain of each other.  
We do that because all human love, broken and impure as it is, points to God's unending love.

As we said last week, this poem is about sexual love, but this love is an analogy to God's love  
"My beloved is mine and I am his"  
reminds us that God loves us  
came looking for us  
invited us to choose him  
to commit to him  
to give ourselves to him.

Now, there are foxes in our relationship with God too:  
things that disrupt, things that get in the way.  
We have fears that he will desert us, dreams that cause fears – but are not true.  
And it is as we learn to know that he loves and that we are loved, that we in turn are enabled to love,  
and to allow the love of Jesus to flow into all our broken relationships.

So, if you are married – let Christ into your marriage.  
Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved you and gave himself for you.  
Wives, love your husbands – as you as you grow to love the Lord.

And, if you are single, bring Christ into that.  
Indeed, Paul suggests in Corinthians, that you may be able to love Christ even more wholeheartedly.

And, if you have been abused, or hurt, let down, or scarred,  
allow the love of Jesus Christ to enter into that.

For true marriage has no secrets, but is based on trust and honesty,  
and those too must be the marks of our relationship with God in Christ Jesus.

"My beloved is mine, and I am his". Amen