

Holy, Horrid, and Hilarious Meals of the Bible

Part 6: Song of Solomon

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Scripture: Song of Solomon 4:12-15; 5:1; 7:11-13

I. God's Beauty and Delight

Scripture: Song of Solomon 4:12-15; 5:1; 7:11-13

Ok – be honest – how many of you knew there was a book in the bible named Song of Solomon? I had heard of the Song of Solomon but I also thought it was in another book of the bible, you know, like the Song of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15, or The *Magnificat*: Song of Mary, in the Gospel of Luke. When I first had to preach on this text, I went to I Kings looking for it! It's one of those books of the Hebrew Bible that you don't hear a lot about, really. Perhaps this is because it is one big love letter, or poem, that makes you blush at times so people are not so anxious to talk about it in small groups. But of course the confirmation students are now rushing to try and find it, right?!

The Song of Solomon, also known as the “Song of Songs” is a beautiful piece of literature. It is only eight chapters long and is the 22nd book of the bible, found right between Ecclesiastes and the prophet Isaiah. It is the very last book of what is considered the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible which also includes the books of Job, Psalm, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.

The phrase “Song of Songs” in Hebrew is used like naming something the “Best of the Best,” or the “Holy of the Holies.” It was originally written in Aramaic, not Hebrew, which dates this sometime after the Babylonian exile in the 6th Century. Scholars have concluded that its style places its origin sometime around the 3rd Century BCE. The writing itself gives us no real clue as to its author or why it was written, but it is thought that it might have been written as a play or a festival rite that was meant to be performed in some way.

It is a unique piece within the Hebrew Bible in that it does not attempt to teach anyone anything, nor does it set any boundaries for living well in society, like the books previous to it. What it does do is celebrate Love. It is written in two voices, voices that yearn for one another and find harmony in one another. There is also a chorus of voices who participate as a sort of audience to the conversation and help involve the participation of the reader as if they are overhearing a set of intimate invitations.

Judaism reads these texts on the Sabbath of Passover and it is seen as an allegory of the relationship between God and Israel. In this relationship, the two partners are equal to one another and in a deep and committed relationship. Christianity has picked up on this allegorical

reading of the text and expanded it to include the relationship of Christ to the church at large, like marriage partners.

Now that we know a little bit more about the history and the setting for these texts in the Song of Solomon, let us take a look at the writing itself. The texts Eric chose for this week present a lush feast of a variety of ripe fruit, fragrant blossoms, milk, honey, and rich spices to be celebrated and enjoyed, setting a holy meal before us as a gift from God for us to share. This is the setting of love; a relationship which honors the beauty of the other by celebrating how the scents and tastes of this beauty cause us to feel and yearn for the other.

This is the way God relates with us, sees us, and celebrates all of creation. The beauty and richness of smells and flavors bring us into a celebration of love, enjoying each other from the uniqueness in which we were created. And from this love we are compelled to open ourselves to the other, reaching out to both give and receive all that God intends for the fullness and abundance of life. This is indeed a Holy Meal. One shared between the Creator and the created, for the enjoyment of the love that is shared by all.

Creation, all of us, is God's beauty and delight. This beauty and delight is all God sees when God reviews that which was declared good in creation. And God continues to provide for, and sustains this relationship, so that every day we might open our eyes and gaze upon God's delight everywhere we look. And love continues to fill our hearts in abundance.

As we listen to our musical offering, consider how you feel when you look at creation. Can you see one another through God's eyes of love? Are you moved to utter words of poetry such as those expressed by our scripture writer this morning? Where do you see the beauty and delight that God sees? How are you called to share the love you experience?

Musical Offering: *Love Divine, All Love Excelling*, arr. by John Stainer and *Beautiful Love* by Victor Young

II. Pure Imagination

Willy Wonka Movie Clip (4:00) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZ-uV72pQKI>

Children's Moment

Creation is declared good. God's delight continues to be nourished and flourish. And we spend our days running around in wonder and delight of all God lays out before us, like we have just walked into Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory, right?

Not quite. Some would say, not even close. What are we doing with God's Delight? Are the scenes we see on the news at night, or flashing on our Facebook pages, scenes of beauty and abundance? Richness and joy? Not often. Instead we see children abandoned or caged at our borders, we see parents carrying their children from bombed out buildings looking for any place in front of them that might offer a shield or protection from the fiery rampage that is war. We see whales and other sea life washed up on our beaches, dead from ingesting too much plastic

in their systems. And we see glaciers melting before our eyes because our eco system has been altered to that point of global warming we can no longer reverse. The waters of the earth are rising at an accelerated rate, while the sun's beautiful rays are becoming a burning threat to our skin, rather than a gentle warmth on our arms so cherished on a summer's day.

Where is our yearning for the beauty? Is there no beauty left to be found? Do we no longer have the capacity to celebrate and enjoy the love God has for us? Are we humans doomed to careen toward self-destruction while damaging all the rest of creation along the way? Have we stopped intentionally looking for the beauty that transforms our actions?

How can we get this back? What if we practiced celebrating love and beauty in our world as much as we report all the doom and gloom? Would our actions follow our vision? Would we start to lift each other up instead looking for each other's weaknesses? I wonder if our suicide rates might lessen if we practiced entering life each day as if we just entered Willy Wonka's factory, in awe and wonder of the beauty that is all around us, even in the midst of struggle.

There is a woman in our community who has committed her life to intentionally seeking out and naming the beauty God sees in the world. Donna Knutson signs all of her blogposts with the salutation "Beauty," and she only posts pictures of beautiful flowers and laughing babies on her Facebook page.

Yesterday, I was surrounded in rainbows and people celebrating love... all love. I still have colorful tattoos on my arm and rainbow bracelets on my wrists to remind me of the amazing energy I felt as I wandered from booth to booth in the Baxter arena participating in the Heartland Pride Fest. The children were smiling, and adults were adorned in bright colors and the many stickers each booth gave out for free, just for the fun of it! What a celebration! What Joy! What Love!

Perhaps we are trying after all. How else might we intentionally seek out the beauty and delight of God each day? What amount of beauty do we need to experience before we might reach out to our Creator in the same invitation God extends to us *"Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields, and lodge in the villages; ¹²let us go out early to the vineyards, and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. ¹³The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and over our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved."*

Let us go out today and enjoy the feast that God shares with us. May we be that which causes beauty and delight in each other as well as in the eyes of our Creator.

The feast begins here, at this table of love and reconciliation, where Jesus, on the night he was betrayed...