

SERMON FOR SUNDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2024
ST JUDE'S, BRIGHTON

Song of Songs

I like the TV advert for relieving blocked noses. A teenage boy and girl are sharing a long affectionate kiss on a bench seat when the boy rolls out of the embrace and falls to the ground short of breath. No need to have accompanying dialogue to understand what is being revealed. Language though - the spoken and written forms - remain vitally important in expressing what we believe and think and love. Words are capable of expressing deeply held beliefs, truths we fiercely hold to, and feelings of passion.

*"My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite."
Shakespeare Romeo and Juliet.*

Kathryn and Emma-Kate's published letter bravely revealing their love of and devotion to Emerson. Their words add immensely to what we see with our eyes.

This morning's lesson from the Song of Songs is an example of the use of language to express deeply held feelings and belief.

Some sermons are for teaching, others are for exhortation, others are to inspire spiritual growth. This sermon, focussing on the Song of Songs, seeks to inspire us to use passionate language in life's journey with God. To not be afraid to use words and language that will best express what we want to tell God in prayer, or to better express our new life in Christ. Throw off the old forms of expression that no longer fit the new life we have.

The voice of my beloved!

*Look, he comes,
leaping upon the mountains,
bounding over the hills.
My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag.*

Look, there he stands

*behind our wall,
gazing in at the windows*

looking through the lattice. Song of Songs 2.9

With the Song of Songs the language used is rural. It uses nature to capture what the author wants to say. But it remains very human. It is highly sensuous, and suggestive. Scholars vary in their opinion on the purpose of the text. They agree it is an allegory but vary whether it speaks of the love relationship between God and Israel, or between Christ and the church, or between Christ and the individual's soul.

I get a lot of enjoyment from the Old Testament because its story reveals something of my own interaction with God. Whether in the context of disobedience, or of forgiveness and restoration. I think it mimics something of my interaction with God. Does it yours?

We understand that God is without body, parts or passion (understanding the word passion to mean that God's nature lacks fickleness, or is prone to run hot or cold). But to speak of God or to God without human language is unhelpful and frankly impossible for most of us. Unless we practice silent contemplative prayer.

The language used in the Song of Songs is highly sensuous, and suggestive. Scholars suggest that it is an allegory of the love relationship between God and Israel, or between Christ and the church, or between Christ and the individual's soul.

Whatever! The following words with others from the Song of Songs may be useful as a base upon which to build private prayer to God. Certainly a good candidate to meditate upon. An encourager to tell God what we think of him and how beautiful we see our relationship with him.

*“Place me like a seal over your heart,
 like a seal on your arm;
 for love is as strong as death,
 its jealousy unyielding as the grave.
 It burns like blazing fire,
 like a mighty flame.
 Many waters cannot quench love,
 rivers cannot wash it away.
 If one were to give
 all the wealth of his house for love,
 it would be utterly scorned.” Song of Songs 8.6-7*

Fr John