

Minister's Message 5-6-2020

Hello everyone! This is Rev. Melinda and Pastor Tancrede from Shiloh UCC. I hope everyone's doing well and staying healthy. I miss seeing all of you and I miss being physically in the church. Some people avoid church. They just don't feel comfortable. But for others this quarantine is not so easy. Nerds like me really like church. I have always liked being in God's house, so it is difficult for me to do ministry like this. I'm not the only one, though.

Everyone I talk with on the phone tells me the same thing. I was surprised. We all miss worshiping in our beautiful Sanctuary at Shiloh UCC. However, for now, Tancrede and I ask you to forgive our simple ways, and worship in Spirit with us through these basic midweek messages and YouTube services.

Yes, this is a difficult time for all of us. So I thought I would take you on a journey. **I thought I would take you out of this everyday struggle of numbers, this stressful waiting game with no clear end, and share with you something from the Bible that you don't hear every day.** Actually you don't hear this text much at all. It rarely comes up in the Lectionary, and somehow I have a feeling that not many pastors have the courage to preach on it. I have never preached on its words, either. So, by now, you must be curious what book of the Bible I'm talking about.

Well, you know it's spring. Even though we are not spending much time outside, the weather is slowly warming up and the birds and the bees are singing their happy song. No matter how old you are, sunshine brings happy feelings. Love is in the air. So today, my reading will be a bit unusual, because it speaks about love; not Agape love, just plain, human love.

The book I am going to share with you comes from the Wisdom literature and is called the Song of Solomon. Right now people are getting on each other's nerves, because we are closed up in our houses 24/7. It's a good time to read poetry and talk about love. And not just any love, but romantic love.

Think about it. We are closed up. We have lots of time. **Why make war, when we can make love?** I think the secret to a long marriage is to keep falling in love with each other over and over again. That's what I saw in my parents' marriage and that's what I experience in mine.

Falling in love with each other is important. And if you are **not** “*head over heels*” in in love right now, maybe this little reading will help you remember how precious your partner is. The Song of Solomon could help you discover this, and fall in love again. So I challenge you to listen closely to our scripture.

Do you remember what it is like to be in love? Can you remember the youthful bliss of just being together? I sat in a stairwell listening to Tancrede for six hours when we were courting. I was mesmerized by his every word. I do not know how I did it. When I am angry with him, I cannot listen with that kind of attention for even one minute!

After fourteen years of marriage, it’s easy to forget how charming your lover is. When we get stressed, we forget how irreplaceable our loved ones are. Can you replace a sacred soul that’s walked with you through thick and thin? No. Of course not. So today let’s remember the little things that make our lovers special. Today, let’s take the time to *fall in love again...*

When we are alone, sermons like this one can feel isolating. If for some reason that person is not in your life right now, you can still take a moment and give thanks. Let’s all take a silent moment to be grateful to God for the ones that got away, for those who have died, and those whose beauty still lives in our memory. Let’s rekindle the love we felt, and then, let go.

There is enough love in each moment to transform all of us. I hope that you will use this scripture for inspiration and hope, whether you are in a relationship now or not. I hope that this little homily will help you find love again. Church is a place where we connect with others. It is a place where people can meet without the distractions of loud music, drinking, or dancing. You may not believe me, but church is also a place for divorced people. After the pain of a love that didn’t stand the test of time, church is the perfect place for them to heal and rebuild their lives.

Church is for lovers. So as we hear the Song of Solomon let’s rejoice in human love. Let’s open our hearts, and remember our beloved, right here, right now.

Song of Solomon Chapter 2 (NRSV)

M: 2 I am a rose of Sharon,
a lily of the valleys.

**T: 2 As a lily among brambles,
so is my love among maidens.**

M: 3 As an apple tree among the trees of the wood,
so is my beloved among young men.

With great delight I sat in his shadow,
and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

4 He brought me to the banqueting house,
and his intention toward me was love.

5 Sustain me with raisins,
refresh me with apples;
for I am faint with love.

6 O that his left hand were under my head,
and that his right hand embraced me!

7 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild does:

do not stir up or awaken love
until it is ready!

M: 8 The voice of my beloved!

Look, he comes,
leaping upon 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 in at the windows,
looking through the lattice.

10 My beloved speaks and says to me:

**T: “Arise, my love, my fair one,
 and come away;
 11 for now the winter is past,
 the rain is over and gone.
 12 The flowers appear on the earth;
 the time of singing has come,
 and the voice of the turtledove
 is heard in our land.
 13 The fig tree puts forth its figs,
 and the vines are in blossom;
 they give forth fragrance.
 Arise, my love, my fair one,
 and come away.
 14 O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
 in the covert of the cliff,
 let me see your face,
 let me hear your voice;
 for your voice is sweet,
 and your face is lovely.
 15 Catch us the foxes,
 the little foxes,
 that ruin the vineyards—
 for our vineyards are in blossom.”**

16 My beloved is mine and I am his;
 he pastures his flock among the lilies.
 17 Until the day breathes
 and the shadows flee,
 turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle
 or a young stag on the cleft mountains.

Spring is beautiful in Pennsylvania. Nothing can change that. The powerful rays of our sun, warm even the coldest heart. *Why did I bring a song of love with me today? Why do you think Solomon sang this song? Why is this erotic poetry even in a sacred text like the Bible?*

Because, just as two young lovers fall for each other, God has fallen for you. You are loved with an unimaginable love, whose passion knows no bounds.

God's love includes, and exceeds, all human loves. It is omnipresent, omnipotent, and benevolent. God loves us completely. God loves us so much that God sent Jesus to us as a love letter. It is not the first time God sent us a love letter. Reading the Song of Songs, reminds us that God has always loved us, and *is still speaking*. God's love is inviting us to a higher path, to Agape Love.

Romantic love always includes some suffering. The stronger you love humanly, the more that love can hurt. But Agape Love, the love with which God loves us, is greater than any human love. Agape Love is blissful always. Agape Love transcends human limitation. It is all knowing, ever present, all powerful, and completely noble, holy, and good. Agape Love always grows, always gets stronger, and it lasts forever.

If you ever experience a morsel of Agape Love, you can never lose it. It will always be in your heart. As more and more love fills your heart, what is human will melt away in the ecstasy of God. Agape Love gave such bliss to Jesus and the Saints that they were unaffected by human torture. This is love. *This is turning the other cheek; that the power of God itself might be the force of your being.* That is my hope and meditation for all of us today. And now let us pray!

Pastoral Prayer

God of love, you created all types of love and all of them are holy and pure before you. Open the doors of our hearts wider, loving God, and help us love with the intensity that we have learned from your Son, Jesus Christ. Inspire us with your Holy Spirit to love all your creation and all your children. Send your sunshine, this Spring, so that we may bring light and joy to other people.

And now we intercede for all your children who are suffering in body, mind, or spirit. Be with those whose hearts are broken. Be with the lonely and the depressed. Send your healing touch into our world and open the doors of our homes wide so that we may walk on the streets safely, and go into stores without any fear.

Be with everyone who is working hard to make our lives better. Bless and be with our children and grandchildren so that they may be able to enjoy this beautiful world. Heal our world so that children can once again play together and go to school.

We pray for schools, businesses, and organizations that cannot meet. Heal our world that we might find a new normal, a safe compromise that helps us to resurrect the American Dream. We pray for wholesome lives blessed by You, O' God. Demonstrate and prove to us without a doubt, that the meek shall inherit the earth. We pray all this in the name of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn #38 (Pilgrim Hymnal) "Morning Has Broken"

Bunessan

Thank you for listening. Tomorrow, Thursday morning at 10:00 AM come and chat with me on Zoom. You will receive the Zoom details in e-mail.

Benediction: And now, go in peace and may the peace of God fill your hearts always. Amen.