

“GOOD BEGINNINGS”

Song of Solomon 2:8-13 Sept. 9th, 2018

Have you noticed? Or are you trying not to notice? (That would be me!) Summer is slipping away from us. We know this because school buses are on the roads again, kids are walking to school, football is on television screens everywhere, and we plan our free time around being able to go to some of the football games around the state and here at home. Fall is rapidly approaching with the changing of the seasons. We observe the shorter days with the touch of fall in the early mornings and the beginning of the leaves turning their golds and reds. So it is beginning even as we speak today.

It reminds me of the scripture from Ecclesiastics 3:1-2: There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot...” Solomon’s point in this section is that God has a plan for all people. Thus he provides cycles of life, each with its work for us to do. Timing is important in the cycles of life and the cycles of the seasons. All of the experiences listed in this text are appropriate at certain times. The secret to peace with God is to discover, accept and appreciate God’s perfect timing. The danger is to doubt or resent God’s timing. This can lead us to trouble—despair, rebellion or moving ahead without his advice.

“...a time to plant and a time to uproot...” Being a city girl, I don’t have the agricultural background to really understand some of the timing of this. So I asked several friends to enlighten me a little. I learned that in southeastern Wyoming the harvest usually happens around Cheyenne Frontier Days. But this year because of the weather it was a week early and that it is done. However, planting for the winter wheat is happening right now and it’s a very busy time for the farmers! I did learn in the course of my education that here on the desert high plains there is only time for one planting because the growing season is so brief and unpredictable. Hail is always a possibility in this area and it can wipe out a year’s work in a short period of time. So to be a farmer in this area you are also a gambler—hoping and praying that you can harvest your crop before the hail gets it!

Today we are beginning a five week series titled “Season of Creation.” This is an ecumenical observance during the month of September begun by a Lutheran pastor in Australia in 2000 and expanded and spread worldwide with the support of the Uniting Church Australia beginning in 2004. The idea was to create a season, a period of at least four weeks, leading up to the

observance of St. Francis Day, October 4. For 2018, we are incorporating a variety of readings that contain images of planting, mountains, sky, harvest, and blessing. The scripture focus after today's message will be on the Psalms.

As we talk today about the blessings of creation, an abundant, full creation, Solomon sings this song about the goodness of creation, In the portion of the Song of Solomon appointed for this morning, he sings "For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, and flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land, the fig tree puts forth its fruit and the vines are in blossom, they put forth fragrance."

This is a song of the goodness of nature. Someone has said, in fact, that it is the most beautiful song to nature in the Old Testament. And it is a song that each of us has sung at times in our lives, I hope, when we are filled with the beauty of the world and the wonder of the pattern of nature. The goodness of creation is reflected on an autumn afternoon, when the trees are dripping with color, like an artist's autumn palette all crimson and orange and gold, and the world itself seems an abundant place. My family and I are going to Estes Park this afternoon for a few days and they are telling us it's the beginning of "prime viewing time" for the fall colors in Rocky Mountain National Park.

The goodness of creation is reflected when you rise on a winter morning and the new moon is hanging in the winter sky, two planets shine brightly beside the crescent as the sun edges its way up toward the horizon. It is cold and clear and breathtakingly beautiful. It is cold, better get the newspaper and get back inside. The goodness of creation is reflected in the seasons, spring and summer, autumn and winter. There is a pattern to the created order and it is good. "For lo, the winter is past."

But the song is not simply a song to the goodness and beauty of creation, a simple song to spring arriving. No, the creation song is only background music to what many see as the main tune of the Song of Solomon, which is this song of love, the song of two lovers: "the voice of my beloved, look, he comes leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills," "my beloved is like a gazelle, or a young stag," "my lover is mine and I am him, who browses among the lilies," "catch us the foxes, the little foxes that damage the vineyards when the vineyards are in bloom."

Another interpretation of this passage is explained by Harold Horton who wrote in a preface to his book Chords from Solomon's Song: The simple

theme of this heavenly song is “Jesus and His love.” The true believer who reads it is quite at ease in its seeming mysteries. He is not perplexed by the glowing imagery. It is not an image he sees, but a Lover—not a simile, but a Saviour.”

Here in this classic though, we come to this beautiful and easily understood statement. In chapter 2:16 we have this incredible assured statement from the young woman to her beloved, “My beloved is mine, and I am his..” Contained in those eight words is a note of absolute assurance. Horton wrote, “Many contingencies change the course of love for us. No contingencies change Him we love. Our grandest assurances of mutual possession is not in our holiness or faithfulness but His.” We can claim the same words, “My beloved is mine, and I am his,…” and our assurance is not because of what we can bring into the bond, into the marriage. We cannot claim some sort of victory through what we have achieved, but we can claim to know and have experienced His great love!

James Small wrote a lovely old hymn, that Horton quotes:

I’ve found a friend, O such a friend! He loved me ere I knew Him;
He drew me with the cords of love, and thus He bound me to Him;
And round my heart still closely twine those ties which naught can sever,
For I am His, and He is mine, forever and forever.

(Hosea 11:4) “ I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.” This was the message of God to his unfaithful people; it was a message which said I love you even when you had no time for me.

There has been many a climber/explorer, who at one time or another have been only too glad to be tied to their companion when the road has been rough and the way uncertain. This is perhaps the main part of the message I want to bring this morning. You and I have in Jesus Christ, more than a friend, but one who is beloved and is mine and we are His!

Jesus, the beloved of God, came so that we who are hopelessly lost in sin, would be brought back into a loving relationship with the Father. Phrases such as ‘adopted as children’, ‘no longer aliens’ are precious statements.’ Jesus the beloved of God came for us! (Philippians 2:8) ‘And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!’”

The Life Application Commentary on Ephesians 1:6 "...now that we belong to his dearly loved Son, God's favour to us is realized by our union with Christ. We could say that God's love for his only Son motivated him to have many more sons." The bond of love which exists between us and God is not reliant on us and the love we can produce. It is love from God which brought us back to the place we should be in Christ Jesus! (2Thessalonians 2:13) "As for us, we always thank God for you, dear brothers and sisters beloved of the Lord. We are thankful that God chose you to be among the first to experience salvation, a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy and by your belief in the truth."

So here in Paul's writings is the fact that –the beloved of God came to our world to claim back, transform, bring the sinner who God had always loved, to the place where we know and understand once again that we are God's beloved. There is the story of Mark Baylis that illustrates this point. Through quite amazing circumstances he was reunited with his birth mother. Adopted at birth and brought up by wonderful parents, yet there was still the longing to know what had happened, that he was really loved. The moment of the reunion came, suddenly with the knowledge which changed his life. Despite being far away, separated, he was always the beloved. This story serves to highlight the fact that despite separation through sin, we are and always have been God's beloved.

"How great is the love that Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God!" And that is what we are!...

We are told that in the 60s when the hippies were around, 'flower power and free love', many young people distorted those beautiful words, "God is love" to "Love is God"—By that they meant, anything they called "love" had to be "god." (Something which they saw as supreme in their life). But love by any of man's definitions is not God. God IS love!

Lennon and McCartney wrote, "No one you can save that can't be saved...It's easy. All you need is love, all you need is love." The trouble was that they were looking to the god Love and not to the God of love.

John as he wrote his majestic letter asked, "Behold, what manner of love..." John himself answers that it was the most tender and beautiful that love could be. He adopts us into his family, and we are taught to address Him in the same way that Jesus His Son speaks to him. 'Our Father'! If we can measure His love, it has to be in the way of humans. We are adopted into His family. Can there be a higher measure of human love that can be shown when a family adopts a

child, brings that child into the family with all the rights of a blood child? Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.’ (Romans 14:8) ‘If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.’”

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.’ (1 John 4:7-8) John addresses them as beloved or in the modern translations, Dear Friends. That was his name for them, but it is spoken in the knowledge that they were “dear friends” because they were one in Christ Jesus.

“My beloved is mine, and I am His.”

Please pray with me. May we live in the certain knowledge that He is our Loving Father and that we are his beloved! May that wonderful knowledge be the foundation for life. We need our Beloved Friends. We must be together in Christ, that His name will be glorified in us and through us. Amen.