

A reading from the Book the Song of Songs

Hark! my lover—here he comes

springing across the mountains,

leaping across the hills.

My lover is like a gazelle

or a young stag.

Here he stands behind our wall,

gazing through the windows,

peering through the lattices.

My lover speaks; he says to me,

“Arise, my beloved, my dove, my beautiful one, and come!

O my dove in the clefts of the rock,

in the secret recesses of the cliff,

Let me see you,

let me hear your voice,

for your voice is sweet,

and you are lovely.”

My lover belongs to me and I to him.

He says to me:

“Set me as a seal on your heart,

as a seal on your arm;

For stern as death is love,

relentless as the nether world is devotion;

its flames are a blazing fire.

Deep waters cannot quench love,

nor floods sweep it away.”

The Word of the Lord. *R. Thanks be to God*

Commentary

Readers are often shocked to find this little-known book tucked into the pages of the Old Testament. It is a love poem describing two young lovers discovering the beauty of their created bodies, and their desire to share it in love and mutual fidelity. Parts of the book express erotic love. The gift of sexuality is affirmed and portrayed without apology. There is radical equality with both lovers desiring to share in it with equal intensity. Love is seen as a communion of souls.

This passage seems operatic. It describes a young man appearing at his beloved's window just before dawn, wooing her into the countryside blossoming with springtime life and promise. The maiden makes a statement that beautifully describes the mutuality of marriage, “My lover belongs to me, and I to him.” He then declares the ferocity of love, for just as stern as death is, love is even more relentless. Love is eternal.