

Lockdown Worship



Week beginning Sunday 10 October 2021

This week's reflection: How Does God's Love Come to Us?

is by Jill Kayser, Transition Ministry Facilitator

A Call to worship in love (adapted from Psalm 134)

All you who serve God come and offer thanks

Thank you God for your love for me.

All who gather in thought and spirit, lift your hands and praise God

Thank you God for your love in this place, at this time.

Shout praises to God, you beloved servants of God

Thank you God for Your love for others.

All who serve in this community sharing God's love

Thank you God for calling us to share Your love.

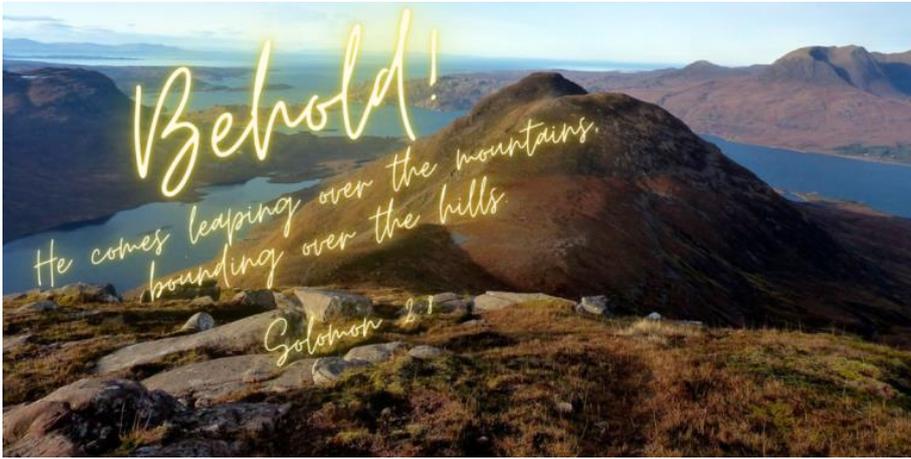
Praise the name of God.

Your love endures forever.

Amen



Let's pause and reflect: How have we felt and shared God's love this week?



Song of Songs 2:8-13

Listen! My beloved! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice.

My beloved spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me.

See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone.

Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land.

The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."

Reflection: How does God's Love Come to Us?

Well we've made it through this far through lockdown and although there are many moments of frustration I haven't joined the dog in chewing the furniture, but I have started to resemble him with my shaggy hair look – oh for the day I can sit in the chair of The Terraces Salon again.

Our scripture reading for today is a beautiful meditation on love. Listen again to what the beloved says to his beloved. *"Arise my love my fair one and come away, for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs and the vines are in blossom; they give forth their fragrance."*

The Songs of Songs where this reading comes from is an Old Testament book that is as unique as it is beautiful. It's unique because the voice of a woman makes up most of the book. Over 75% is her voice. Her story rather than his story. It's unusual because it makes no mention of God. Or does it?

Many commentators have written much about it. I think it answers one of the most basic of human questions. How does God's love come to us?

How, in the middle of a lockdown, does God's love come to us?

How, in the middle of a global pandemic, does God's love come to us?

How, in the midst of tension and fighting overseas, does God's love come to us?

How in the midst of tragic deaths, does God's love come to us?

It's all very well for Christians to speak of God's love, but how does it show itself?

In five short verses The Song of Songs offers us three possibilities.

First, God's love is shown to us through other people. Whether we live alone or with others, whether we are married or single, we experience God's love on a daily basis through the love of other people. All interaction with others can be a source of love.

Lockdown serves to highlight how dependant we are on those we often take for granted: supermarket workers, nurses and doctors, the people that keep the sewage working and the electricity, the scientist in the back room brewing up vaccines and the childcare workers, the rest home workers and the truck drivers. We are created to need other people and we see God's love in and through others.

The Song of Songs answers the question: how do we see the love of God? in a second way. In Creation. God, out of Love, created this world to be our home. Rita Snowdon, a Methodist from Nelson wrote: *"God's world is conceived in hope, dawn follows darkness, Spring follows the leaf-strewn way of Winter, the world is born anew in every child the resurrection lies just beyond what we call death"* We are currently enjoying the Spring weather in all its variations – wind, rain, sunshine... The trees in our gardens and parks are bursting with blossom and everywhere we see the vibrant colours of Spring. The butterflies are flying around and the Tuis are singing to us from the treetops. The writer of the Song of Songs sees God's love in the beauty and the faithfulness of God's creation.

A third way the Song of Songs sees the love of God is that it is like the intimacy of a man and woman very much in love. We see this passionate love that God has for the world supremely in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The good news is that Jesus is alive today, we can also know him in the here and now. In a living intimate relationship with Jesus, we discover God's love for us. To discover the love that God has for us is to discover the secret at the heart of the universe. God's love. *"The essence of prayer,"* writes Ruth Burrows, *"is to let ourselves be loved, to let ourselves be given to, to let ourselves be worked upon by this great God and made capable of total union with God."*

Prayer then is best understood as allowing ourselves to be loved by God in the present moment. The Song of Songs answers the question how does God's love come to us, but it doesn't stop there. It goes on to tell us how strong this love we find in God is: *"many waters cannot quench love, neither floods drown it, for love is as strong as the grave."*

How in the middle of a lockdown does God's love come to us? How in the middle of a global pandemic does God's love come to us? How in the midst of tension and fighting overseas does God's love come to us? How in the tragic deaths of the young does God's love come to us? God's love comes to us through others, God's love comes to us in the Spring creation, God's love comes to us in a life-giving relationship with Jesus. And God's love is stronger than any kind of death, even and most especially COVID 19.

A Love Story (shared in "Neighbourly" this week)



A letter from the Post Office... We don't know who replied, but there is a beautiful soul working in the "dead letter" office.

Our 14-year-old dog Abbey died last month. The day after she passed away my 4-year-old daughter Meredith was crying and talking about how much she missed Abbey. She asked if we could write a letter to God so that when Abbey got to heaven, God would recognize her. I told her that I thought we could so, and she dictated these words:

Dear God,

Will you please take care of my dog? She died yesterday and is with you in heaven. I miss her very much. I 'm happy that you let me have her as my dog even though she got sick.

I hope you will play with her. She likes to swim and play with balls. I am sending a picture of her so when you see her you will know that she is my dog. I really miss her.

Love, Meredith

We put the letter in an envelope with a picture of Abbey and Meredith, addressed it to God/Heaven. We put our return address on it. Meredith pasted several stamps on the front of the envelope because she said it would take lots of stamps to get the letter all the way to heaven. That afternoon she dropped it into the letter box at the post office. A few days later, she asked if God had received the letter yet. I told her that I thought He had.

Yesterday, there was a package wrapped in gold paper on our front porch addressed, 'To Meredith' in an unfamiliar hand. Meredith opened it. Inside was a book by Mr. Rogers called, 'When a Pet Dies.' Taped to the inside front cover was the letter we had written to God in its opened envelope. On the opposite page was the picture of Abbey and Meredith and this note:

Dear Meredith,

Abbey arrived safely in heaven. Having the picture was a big help and I recognized her right away.

Abbey isn't sick anymore. Her spirit is here with me just like it stays in your heart. Abbey loved being your dog. Since we don't need our bodies in heaven, I don't have any pockets to keep your picture in so I'm sending it back to you in this little book for

you to keep and have something to remember Abbey by.

Thank you for the beautiful letter and thank your mother for helping you write it and sending it to me. What a wonderful mother you have. I picked her especially for you. I send my blessings every day and remember that I love you very much. By the way, I'm easy to find. I am wherever there is love.

Love, God

As God calls us to pray let's....

- ♥ Confess and repent for our wrong doings trusting in God's gracious forgiveness
- ♥ Remember those who are isolated, struggling, sick, scared, hurt...
- ♥ Ask for guidance for our leaders in so many areas of life
- ♥ Notice opportunities for sharing God's love
- ♥ Give thanks for the immense blessings in our lives

My reflection this week was inspired and informed by a sermon written by Rev Nick Mountforth of Christchurch and the "Love Story" was published in this week's Neighbourly email.