

Britt Carlson
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11 o'clock am

Community Church of Issaquah
Issaquah, WA

“CHURCH: Christ’s Bride”

Song of Songs 6:1-10

I love my grandpa. And I’ve always known that my grandpa loved me. But for the longest time my grandpa never actually said it. In fact, when my sisters’ and I would hug him goodbye, we’d say, “We love you, grandpa.” And he’d say “Thank you.”

“Thank you” is not the appropriate response to someone saying I love you. When someone says, “I love you,” you say..... [I love you too!]. *Exactly.*

So we started giving him a hard time about it. And then one day, I hugged my grandpa goodbye, said “I love you grandpa” and all of a sudden it was like the dam burst forth and he went, “Love ya, love ya.”

Words matter. Putting into words our love for each other matters. We laughed that all those “love yas” came pouring out of my grandpa, but you know what, I always wait now to hear him say “love ya” after I tell him I love him. Hearing “I love you” matters to me.

Saying I love you is important enough that God gave us an entire book of the Bible dedicated to it—the Song of Songs or the Song of Solomon. Whichever name you’ve heard for it is fine. In Hebrew, it’s the Song of Songs which is Solomon’s. But nobody calls it that.

I *love* reading Song of Songs. And I especially love reading the Song of Songs in *church* because it feels so *scandalous*. Song of Songs is erotic poetry. Yes, it’s a picture of God desiring the church as his bride—and we’ll get to that in a bit—...but first and foremost to put it bluntly it’s a poem about the joy of sex. It’s the call and response of two people who are completely taken by one another and who aren’t afraid to declare it to the world.

Think about what we just read: “Turn your eyes away from me, for they overwhelm me! Your cheeks are like halves of pomegranates. My dove, my perfect one.” Now that’s a *very* mild passage in the Song of

Songs. I didn't want poor Jacquie to have to burn our ears too much ☺.

I wish I could say that I was too prudish for us to read it, but let's be honest, I'm a hopeless romantic.

And the Song of Songs doesn't hold back. Go home and read it. It's the pure delight of the lover and beloved. Delight in each other's whole person, but especially delight in one another's bodies. These are two people who are undone by one another. Propriety, good manners, conversational taboos—they're out the window. Their mutual delight refuses to be constrained in one another's presence.

That word delight. Many couples have pet names for each other. My dad calls my mom sugarplum. My mom calls my dad hon. And in the Song of Songs, the beloved calls the lover, "my delightful man." Delight. That's what this whole book is about. Isn't that a great word? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines delight as taking great pleasure in or giving a strong sense of satisfaction. The lover and beloved take great pleasure in one another. They're satisfied with one another.

And here's the crazy thing: that means God takes pleasure in us. See, when we say that the Song of Songs is Scripture, we're saying that we believe this book reveals God to us. We're saying that this description of a lover and a beloved somehow is a picture of the relationship between God and us. That all of this eros and passion and sex and desire somehow is similar to the intimacy that God wants with us.

The fact that Song of Songs is in our Bible tells us that in understanding sexual desire we might understand God more. And that in understanding God more we might understand sex more fully.

Wow.

We are objects of God's passion.

I don't know if you've ever heard the saying "I love you, but I don't like you right now." Sometimes I think that's how we think God sees us. We think that God might love us, God is patient with us, God is kind, God keeps no record of our wrongs. But the Lord more often than not has to put up with us than enjoy us. It's a love of duty rather than a love of passion.

Now I'm not saying there aren't times when God might be angry with us, but what I want you to hear today is that God wants you. God desires you. The Lord's relationship with us is not an arranged marriage or a marriage of convenience. The thing about God is that God doesn't have to do anything God doesn't want to. God is not required to desire us. God is not required to describe the divine love for his creatures in terms so passionate as the Song of Songs. God could have been content with describing our relationship as a parent/child relationship. But God isn't content with just that. God isn't satisfied with that. It doesn't delight God to only describe us as children.

It delights God to describe us as his bride. We are God's bride. His chosen one. Freely God has chosen to commit himself to us. Simply because God desired us.

A few months ago I got a clearer picture of how big a role desire and passion plays in a romantic relationship when I made up this silly game.

I would ask my friends and family, "If attraction played absolutely no part of the equation, who out of all your friends would you marry and why?" Well, everyone had great answers, and so I decided to ask my boyfriend. And he thinks about it for a while and says, "Well, I can't think of a single friend I want to marry. But if attraction had zero part to play in picking a spouse, I would want someone who was smarter than me and who had a lot of skills."

Skills, well that was new to me, so I asked him what he meant. "You know," he said, "like house-cleaning skills, cooking skills, canning skills, gardening skills." And suddenly I realized: if passion doesn't play a role, my boyfriend's ideal partner is a maid.

That'll give a girl pause.

Now why did that give me pause? We all know why! It's because the relationships that matter most to us shouldn't simply be about use. That the other person would be a useful part of our lives.

For example, I can't imagine that when Duane Bowen looked across that funeral home, saw Roma

Burgess standing there, turned to his friend and said “I’m going to marry that girl” that the next thing out of his mouth was “Because she looks like she’s a hard worker who will cook and clean and quilt for me.” I’m pretty sure that if that’s what Duane had been thinking, Roma would not be at his side today.

Now here’s the thing. We know spousal love shouldn’t be about use first and foremost. But don’t we often think that’s how God sees us? Don’t we often think that God wants us to be Christians in order to serve him, to be of use to him?

Song of Songs isn’t scandalous because it’s erotic poetry. Song of Songs is scandalous because it declares that we are first valuable to God not because of anything we *do* but because of everything that we *are*. Song of Songs is scandalous because it declares that God **likes** us. God **delights** in us. God **desires** us.

We might work in God’s vineyard, we might be servants in the kingdom of God, but those are all secondary roles. First, and foremost we’re God’s bride. We’re the ones delighted in. We’re the ones God is undone over. If we serve it’s only

because we’ve first loved and been loved.

It’s like in a marriage. You cook dinners and mop the floors and take out the garbage and mow the lawn not because you were hired for the job. You do all of those things because you want good things for your spouse. You want to build a life of health and wholeness.

That is why we serve.

We serve as one of our ways to show our love to God.

Back in the 17th century, there was a monk in France named Brother Lawrence. Brother Lawrence didn’t have a high position in the monastery. He had the charge of preparing the food and doing the dishes. But Brother Lawrence knew that even doing the dishes could be done as an act of love returned back to God. So he washed every dish as if he were washing it for Christ. And people started to take notice. Soon he had people coming from all over France just to watch this humble brother wash dishes.

Brother Lawrence drew people to him not because of what he was

doing but of why he was doing it. His service was beautiful because it was his way of entering into the love that God has for us. But service like this is only one way of returning God's delight in us. This is only one way of response to God's call.

Many of you have probably heard of the book, "The Five Love Languages." The five love languages are acts of service, words of affirmation, physical touch, gifts and quality time. Usually we think of them between human and human. But if we, the church, are Christ's bride—if God desires a relationship with the church that springs from delight and desire—then those languages are also the languages God can express the divine love to us and we can express our love to God.

We can do acts of service like cleaning up after coffee fellowship. We can spend quality time with the Lord meditating on his Word. We can give God gifts. But God can also do those things with us. Song of Songs teaches us that God wants to lavish his love upon us.

Just think about Jesus. Jesus loves the people. Jesus spends time

teaching the people in the synagogue and on the hillside. Jesus touches the lepers and heals them. Jesus gives all of us the gift of his very life, offering it up on the Christ.

Jesus delights in the people. And we the people gathered around Jesus—we the CHURCH—delight in Jesus. Jesus is our delightful man. Back and forth the delight goes, from God to us and from us to God.

This is our witness. We witness to God's delight in Creation. We witness to the fact that God delights in each and every person. No matter how crooked and fallen a person is, God *desires* that person. We, the church, are Christ's bride who are wooing the world to God. We are God's witness that the Lord wants to make Creation his beloved. The church is God's "Love ya" to the world. We're the "love ya" that bursts forth from God, unable to be contained, spoken over and over. Each one of us, you and me, are God's "I love you" to every person that we come in contact with.

What a responsibility. But what joy. The church is God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to tell the world of God's desire and passion.

We are the beloved who is making
beloveds of the entire world.

Hear these words: God loves you.
God likes you. God delights in you.
Go and do likewise.