

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

August 30, 2009

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Song of Solomon 2:8-13

⁸The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. ⁹My 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. ¹⁰My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; ¹¹for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. ¹²The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. ¹³The 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."

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

¹Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, ²they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. ³(For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) ⁵So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" ⁶He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; ⁷in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' ⁸You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

¹⁴Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

²¹"For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, ²²adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. ²³All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

“Dress for Success”

“The voice of my beloved! Look! ... Arise...”

These are the poetic words of the Song of Solomon, often called the Song of Songs. Even in that title, the Song of Songs, there is that wonderful poet rhythm that is to be heard and felt and repeated.

“The voice of my beloved! Look! ... Arise...”

This rhythm of these deep love poems and poetry of the Song of Songs are part of the pulse of creation itself. One must read the Song of Songs not through the eyes of our culture that sees sexuality upon the words, but one must read the words through the eyes of the goodness of creation. Inherent in the words are that deep breath of the Creating God who steps back from creation and takes it in and can only respond with the—“It is good!”

“It is good!”

“The voice of my beloved! Look! ... Arise...”

We must take the time to take it in...we must take the time to have an awareness about the goodness. We must take the time to really sense the depth that this is all about love. The whole of the creation is about love—and this wonderful old poetry is to connect within us this holy sense of love that pervades the very substance of creation.

It was in love that God created. It was in love that all that came to be came to be. Love is the essence and substance of God and that very love becomes the center of humanity. This love becomes that which is the most real in our lives even if it is also that which is both the most remote and the most mysterious. Love—it is always beyond definition and yet also more tangible than any other reality in our living.

It is about love and it is about what we do with our lives. Vocation is the term that is used to describe the career or identity we have as a person. One’s vocation in our culture is about one’s job. But I believe

vocation is a bigger reality than merely what one does or did or will do in order to bring a paycheck home. I think vocation has more to do with what is at the core of a person. Yes, it is about choices, but it also is about passion and drive and how one constructs meaning in their life and world.

“The voice of my beloved! Look! ... Arise...”

I’m convinced that the ways in which we construct meaning in our lives have more to do with the poetry of the Song of Songs than they do with education, economy, skill, achievement, or talent.

Do you hear your life? Do you see your life? And then what will you do with that? Those are the questions that are prompted in the rhythm of living. “The voice of my beloved! Look! ... Arise...”

“The voice of my beloved.”

It is interesting that the ancient writer points out the truth that you hear that beloved one coming even before you see it taking place. It is about listening. Do you listen to your life?

Do we listen to how we are living? Do we hear the sounds of our life? There is something about listening? In order to listen one has to stop and one has to cease other activity in order take in the sound. One has to get quiet.

There is something to getting quiet. You have to get quiet in order to hear yourself. It is hard for us to do that in our world. There is so much to do that we are usually so over programmed that we convince ourselves we

do not have time for anything else. The idea of taking time to deliberately spend it in quiet is a foreign idea that seems a likely impossibility.

Being quiet is more important for a busy person than it is for anyone else. So if you are, with me, saying there is so much to do that I don't have time to be quiet—then we had better listen up and hear that being quiet is more important for us than anyone.

Why—because the busyness is noise. The busyness, as noise, prevents us from hearing what is at the core of our being. So, when we get quiet we can hear ourselves. The up side of that is we get in touch with our reality and who we really are. The down side to that is we also have to face up to ourselves and who we are and what we do or don't do accordingly.

So there is this need to stop long enough to be quiet to hear what is at the center of your life. You can call that all kinds of things. You can simply call it being quiet or finding silence. You can call it prayer. You can call it spiritual practice. You may do that being quiet by closing your eyes. You may do it by reading scripture. You may do it by journaling. You may do it through yoga. You may do it by running or by soaking in the tub.

It does not matter the manner in which you do quiet. What matter is that you get there so that you can hear....so that you can hear yourself...even hear yourself coming to yourself. In that place where you hear—that is God there. That is the presence of the Holy Creating God of all that is. Come into that presence. “The voice of my beloved! Look! ... Arise...”

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Then look! Look! It is the next part of that poetry of who we are. To look.

Once you can hear and you arrive at that quiet place you then have to look and see what you see there. Look all around. It is about getting inside your life and looking around. What do you see?

As you look at your life it is not about is it good or is it bad? That is too subjective. For all of us there are things that are going well, and then there are things that are not going so well. There is not a one of us that that when we look at our lives we would say—“oh yes, this is exactly where I thought I would end up and I’m so pleased with each and everything about it.” That kind of existence is not realized this side of the glory.

It is not about good or bad—it is more about success. Yes, success. But realize that when I say success I’m not talking about success as a cultural reality. We all know how the culture defines success: money, power, position, security, fame, and fortune.

Such is not success. Success has more to completion and wholeness. If one is successful has one achieved a level of completeness and wholeness? And such wholeness and completeness is found in that vital and living relationship with God.

When we have that experience of the living God in our lives, and when we live that resurrected life on this side of physical death—oh, that is successful living. If we really look we don’t need to so describe what such looks like—we can see it when it is real.

I think such vision was the problem of the gospel lesson. Here they were accusatory to Jesus and his disciples for how they were eating. They had not observed the purification rules as they should have before eating. And Jesus tells them that it not what goes in a person that defiles that person but what comes out of that person.

It is easy for us to get so caught up in the minutia of life that we miss the meaning of life. It is so easy for us to only see on the surface of how things are that we never look with any depth. Whenever something happens if we draw a quick conclusion and are then convinced that this is how it is without looking deeper—we risk the reality of not seeing what is really there for us.

To do so is to face the challenge of the Pharisee in Jesus' day who wanted to make it about what he and his disciples had or had not done and in so doing missed the larger reality of who Jesus was with and why he was with them.

Had they looked at that they would have seen his compassion and his passion for the poor and the downtrodden. They were so busy only seeing the surface that they could not see the place where God was breaking into humanity. They missed it because they did not see.

So see...Look... “The voice of my beloved! Look! ... Arise...”

Arise...yes arise....

To arise is to act. It is to do. It is to lace up your shoes. It is to stand upon the earth. It is to grasp in your hands. It is to take ahold. It is to do. To do...

To act. Arise!

When we listen and look and do not act...when that attentiveness does not transfer into action...then, oh, then we have not only failed to listen and look, but we have failed to love.

“The voice of my beloved! Look! ... Arise...”

It is the rhythm of love. It is the language of love. See—oh see it brothers and sisters, that is what was being spoken so clearly in Jesus the Christ. In his dying on the cross and God raising him up from the dead—that was the sound and the sight and the action of love in its holy and human fullness.

That love of God so lived fully in the Christ...it is in you...it is in the road we take...in the sound and poetry of our living. That love of God so lived fully in the Christ ...it is in you when you do not sit back and wait for someone else to go first.

That love of God so lived fully in the Christ it is in you when you ...ARISE! To so rise is to live in the success of the love that is the very rhythm of life.

So.... “The voice of my beloved! Look! ... Arise...”

Amen.