

“The Time of Singing Has Come”

Song of Solomon 2:8-17

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“The time of singing has come!” In my forty-four years of ordained ministry, I have never preached on the Song of Solomon! The time has come! I suppose the approach of Valentine’s Day has provoked me to do this, for in the Song of Solomon we find the language of romance.

I associate romance with imagination and with spontaneity and with Resurrection, with a real coming back to life! The Song of Solomon is a hidden gem in the Biblical canon. I’m glad we can explore it a bit this morning.

The writer wakes up one morning, leaps out of bed, looks out the window, takes a deep breath, and feels a surge of life coursing through his whole self. He is alive! And he knows it. And he or she just can’t wait to take on the day. As Robin Williams would have said, ‘it’s a carpe diem day!’ It’s as if God has breathed the breath of life into this writer’s soul and there’s no time to lose. The time for singing has come!

As some of you know, the film “Ordinary People” with Mary Tyler Moore and Donald Sutherland is among my top three all time favorites. The young man Jared is in the high school choir, the tenor section. And they are rehearsing for a performance. He is alive to the music and he is also alive to a certain co-ed in the soprano section. They keep making eyes at each other. The bell rings; the school day ends. Then, we see Jared leaving the school through the backdoor.

He literally kicks up his heels and sings with all his might, “Alleluia! Alleluia!” This boy could well have written the Song of Solomon.

“The time for singing has come.” Though Spring is still way off, some of my friends are paging through the seed catalogues and imagining the time for planting, imagining the time for cultivating the soil, imagining the time when the earth will be covered with the beauty of lady slippers and pansies and iris and delphiniums. Their imaginations are working overtime! The writer of the Song of Solomon understands the spirituality of imagination! He or She knows that if we can imagine a day of peace, then peace becomes a possibility. If we can imagine a day when no one goes to bed hungry, then that feast becomes a possibility. If we can imagine the ideal employment situation, then that door can swing wide open. If we can imagine a reconciling God, then the possibility of healing is on the table.

I love it when someone looks at a child and says, “She has a wild imagination.” Or when someone points to a preacher and says, “He has a wild imagination.” Or when someone points to a film maker and says, “She has a wild imagination.” What I believe is that God has a wild imagination! It takes imagination to create an avocado. It takes imagination to create a human heart that is capable of falling utterly head-over-heels in love with another human being. It takes imagination to create an eight-legged spider who spins a web that is more delicate and more complex and more symmetrical than anything Rembrandt could have conceived of. And you and I and the writer of Song of Solomon are created in the image of God. Like God, we have this capacity for imagining a new day: a day when no one feels a need to bully, a day when no one fears being themselves, a day when cancer cells surrender to healthy cells, a day when, like Jared, we step out the back door and sing a few alleluias.

I would say that Jesus was a romantic. One day he picked up a child, drew the crowd's attention to the child, and urged everyone in that crowd to turn and become more like the child. What could Jesus have meant by that? My belief is that Jesus was appealing for spontaneity. If children teach us anything, it is the joy that comes when we allow ourselves to be spontaneous. Of course, I value the planning process. My family is already planning which house on the Delaware shore we'll rent for a week in August. Planning ahead is essential in such matters. But there is a time for spontaneity. There is a time to just lean over and pick that wild flower and hand it to somebody you care about. There is a time to just fall on our knees and pray a prayer of gratitude. There is a time to just march across the room and introduce yourself to that one person you've been longing to meet. There is a time to just put the homework aside and play a few chords on the banjo.

On my sabbatical last summer, I read Grandma Gatewood's Walk. Do you know this woman? At age 65, she was the first woman to hike the entire Appalachian Trail. It was a spontaneous decision! She felt a calling to do it. She didn't tell her family for fear they'd try to stop her. She caught a plane and a bus and a taxi to Springer Mountain, Georgia, and with a tiny backpack headed to Maine! It was as if she had read the Song of Solomon, decided the time for singing had come, and off she went! I commend her story to you.

The writer of the Song of Solomon shares some mighty wisdom. The writer knows how God works. God breathes life into our souls. God breathes life into dry bones. God breathes life into relationships. When God breathes the Spirit into us, it is as if the time for singing has come. Our work is to allow for this to happen. I can hear Archie Bunker saying to Edith, "Stifle it!" But today I hear the louder voice of God saying, "Sing it! Rejoice with me! Kick up your heels and live life abundantly! Be imaginative. Be spontaneous."

Sisters and brothers, let the spirit of romance grab ahold of you and see where the Spirit leads. I know that when I become conscious that the time for singing has come, that's when I know I am living in the greatest of hope. Amen.