

2023 07 09 – A Love Song

Scripture: Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67
Song of Solomon 2:8-13 (The Inclusive Bible)

A couple of weeks ago I officiated at an outdoor wedding in Wymark. It was a beautiful day and the couple had chosen a stunning setting for their wedding with an old barn as their backdrop. This particular bride and groom had written their own vows and they did a beautiful job of expressing their love and commitment to each other.

Today's scripture readings are also stories of love and commitment. The first reading, from Genesis, is the story of an arranged marriage. The father, Abraham, sends his steward to find the perfect wife for Isaac, his son. Abraham has moved to the land of the Canaanites, but he is adamant that Isaac's wife should be from his homeland, the land of his kin. The steward does as he is told and travels to Abraham's homeland. Outside the city of Nahor he stops by a spring of water, and there he finds Rebecca, the granddaughter of Abraham's brother. She, and her family, agree to the arrangement and Rebecca leaves her home to meet her fiancée, Isaac.

At this point, you might be asking yourself, what does this story have to do with love? How could love even come into it, since Rebecca and Isaac were engaged before they had even met? And you would be right. Up to this point, love has very little to do with this particular agreement, this financial transaction. In fact, it was only in the last verse of the reading that love was even mentioned:

Then Isaac took Rebecca into Sarah's tent, and she became his wife,
and he loved her. (Genesis 24:67a)

I have to admit that the first time I read this verse I was pretty skeptical. What did that mean, "and he loved her?" Did it mean that he had sex with her? Did the word "love" mean that Isaac found Rebecca attractive? Or is it possible that his emotions were deeply stirred at their first meeting? How can we know?

Well the amazing thing about the Hebrew language is that it actually has multiple words that get translated into our English word, "love." So, to truly understand what the author of this story was trying to say, we need to go back to the original language of this passage, back to the Hebrew. I'll be honest, I know very little Hebrew, but luckily there are lots of websites that can provide a translation. As it turns out, the phrase "and he loved her" actually uses the Hebrew word "ahava" which means love between two people and is often used to indicate a deep and committed love. So, according to the author, Isaac did instantly "fall in love" with Rebecca. <https://biblehub.com/text/genesis/24-67.htm>

<http://www.harmonyoftheheart.com/2007/02/lighting-flames-of-love.html>

Some of the other Hebrew words for "love" are found in today's other scripture passage. This passage come from a book in the Hebrew Scriptures called The Song of Songs, also known as the Song of Solomon. Today's reading begins with the words of a young woman saying,

Here comes my lover,

Running down the mountains like a gazelle,

Leaping the hills like a stag
in search of a doe.

“Here comes my lover.” Well it turns out the word “lover” in this phrase is actually based on the Hebrew word “Dod.” Dod means erotic or physical love. It refers to the act of making love. In fact, the Song of Songs has several lines that refer to this act. This ancient song is well known to be the most erotic book in the Bible. Many who have read the entire book wonder how on earth it ended up in the Hebrew Scriptures in amongst Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the prophets. There are many ways of interpreting this song, but most scholars agree that it is, most likely, a dialogue between a young woman and her male lover.

<https://biblehub.com/text/songs/2-8.htm>

<http://www.harmonyoftheheart.com/2007/02/lighting-flames-of-love.html>

The short excerpt that Jim read today, ends with the line, “Arise and come, my pretty darling, come away with me!” In this line, the word darling comes from the Hebrew word “raya,” another word for love that actually refers to a friend or companion. It is a reminder of how important it is or for our partner in life to be not only a lover, but also a companion or a soulmate. In some relationships it is the friendship that comes first, before the passion. <https://biblehub.com/text/songs/2-13.htm> <http://www.harmonyoftheheart.com/2007/02/lighting-flames-of-love.html>

But this wonderful love song also contains the Hebrew word, “ahava,” the same word that was used in the story of Isaac and Rebecca. Here’s an excerpt from the eighth chapter of the Songs of Songs where this third word for love is used

and explained:

Love is stronger than death
and as unrelenting. I am jealous
of your love; my heart burns for you
like the fire of God.

No water could ever
put out this fire, love;
no flood could wash it away.

(Song of Songs, 8:6b-7a)

Wow, imagine those words being used in wedding vows! Referring to love as the fire of God. Talk about passion, talk about commitment, talk about love, true love.

<https://biblehub.com/text/songs/8-6.htm>

Many believe that God's love for us is like the love between young couples. In fact, scholars tell us that the only reason the Song of Songs got included in the Hebrew Scriptures was because second-century rabbis saw it as an allegory.

They believed the true subject-matter was not sexual desire between a man and a woman but God's love for Israel. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_of_Songs

God's love for us no doubt does include all three types of love: ahava, dod and raya. And, in fact, it goes even further. There is a fourth word for love that we find in the Hebrew language. That word is "chesed." This is a word that we find in the psalms and in the prophets. Some of the most familiar lines in the Hebrew Scriptures contain this word. Is it translated in various ways such as, "love,

kindness, mercy, goodness, faithfulness and grace.” In the last verse of the 23rd Psalm, “Surely goodness and hesed shall follow me all the days of my life.” Or Micah 6:8, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and love hesed and walk humbly with your God?”

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chesed>

We are loved by the Ground of our Being, the Holy Mystery. We are loved with deep affection, commitment, passion, caring and understanding. And we are called to love not just our partners in life, but our God and all of creation in the same way. We are called to love with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. So let us sing a song of hesed, a song of love.