

Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church
"God is Jealous"

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:1-15a; Matthew 1:18-23

Hymns: Hark the glad sound 118; Love the Lord your God 715; Sleepers, wake! 127;

Prepare the way, O Zion 129

December 14, 2014

Rev. Steve Filyk

It started out rather innocently.

He loved his work:

He enjoyed the projects.

He got along with his colleagues.

He thrived on the excitement

Of being tossed into new and interesting
situations.

So when they asked him to start working overtime

He said 'Yes'.

He said it enthusiastically.

It cut into time with friends.

And he had a lot less time with his wife.

But he loved his work.

And they both enjoyed the extra cash.

...

He loved his work.

And she loved going back to school.

She had always loved school, even as a child.

But this time around she was more focused,

More intent on learning.

She enjoyed her classmates.

Her professors were brilliant.

And the projects she was given
were all related to her career.

Now since her employer was bankrolling this MBA
She also kept a few work files open.

This made for long hours.

When she turned in,

Her husband was often asleep.

But she loved being back at school.

And this program would last only last 16 months.

...

It started out rather innocently.

Both were passionately pursuing their careers.

But somewhere along the way

she realised that they were becoming

More and more disconnected.

Long conversations

Had been replaced by texts or short notes

Left on the fridge or the counter:

'Please pick up some milk.'

'Can you put the wet laundry

Into the dryer?'

As the distance increased,

She started questioning

if they had made the right decision.

But he never commented,

and he seemed completely happy

with this new rhythm in their lives.

Which made her, well jealous.

Jealous!

Shouldn't he want to be with her?
Shouldn't he be concerned
That they were now
like ships passing in the night.

In today's Bible lesson we were told
That God is a jealous God.
A jealous God.

Which may strike some of you as odd.
I mean we often speak of God as compassionate
Or merciful or loving.
But jealous?

In most of our minds
Jealousy is a negative attribute.
We think of jealous people as being petty and small-minded.
Like the co-worker who refuses to celebrate
The promotion of a colleague.

We think of jealous people as being dangerous and controlling.
Like the man who flies off the handle
When his wife has an innocent conversation
With a man in the grocery-store check-out line.

We don't like that word 'jealous'.

And yet, when we think about it,
There is a kind of jealousy
That most would consider healthy:
A desire to guard a cherished relationship.

Our Old Testament lesson reminds us
Just how much God cherishes his people.

They are about to enter a land
That God has given them as a gift, as an inheritance:
A land that is 'flowing with milk and honey'.ⁱ

God has showered this blessing on them
After rescuing them from the cruel slavery
They endured in Egypt.

God clearly cares about these people.

But there's more.
In our New Testament lesson.
You'll find that the same God who had rescued these people
and brought into this promised land
Knew that they would once again fall into slavery.

A slavery far worse than Pharaoh.

And so God send them his own son.
God sent them Jesus
to save them from their sins.ⁱⁱ

God is passionate for God's people
God has chosen them.
God has blessed them.
God will go to any lengths to save them
And guard that relationship with them.

And so God demands their attention.
God lets them know God wants to be
A real priority in their lives:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.
You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart,
and with all your soul,
and with all your might."ⁱⁱⁱ

What is interesting is that from the get-go
We are told that God wants our relationship to be exclusive.
The Lord is **OUR** God.
The Lord is our God **ALONE**.^{iv}

So how do we live in that exclusive relationship?
 Is this relationship to be marked by servitude or submission?
 No this relationship is to be characterised by love.

Not a Hollywood-style exuberant
 But soon fizzling out sort of love,
 But a love that is intentional
 and wholehearted and determined

"In Hebrew, "heart" (leb) is not the seat of emotion
 but of thought, intentionality, and perception.
 The heart connotes commitment...

Similarly, "soul" (nephesh) means "being" or "self,"
 that which constitutes one's life.

The Talmud tells the story of Rabbi Akiva (second century CE)
 who recited the Shema as the Romans tortured him to death;
 he had been waiting his whole life to fulfill the commandment:
 "Now I know that I love him [God]
 with all my life [nephesh]".^v [he said]

"Might" [is less opaque and simply]
 means our capacity to act—what we will ourselves to do."^{vi}

Heart, soul, might...

God is jealously committed to us
 And calls us to respond with a love
 That is similarly intentional, wholehearted, and determined.

Of course we aren't God.
 Our loyalties are often divided
 And our love is much less divine.

How do we ever cultivate
 That sort of passionate response
 That is worthy of our God.

It would seem that the best thing to do
 Is to simply spend some time
 recalling the ways that God has blessed us
 and claimed us and saved us.

One commentator notes that:
 "On so many Sundays,
 Christians are urged to do the heroic
 and to risk the seemingly impossible—

courageously to witness for the faith,
 to suffer the way of the cross,
 to attempt great feats.

Deuteronomy reassures us
 that we are first simply to "hear."

[Hear, O people of Kerrisdale!]

We are passively to allow the good news
 of God's loving covenant
 to reach out to us."^{vii}

For when we take the time to listen
 Seeds of gratitude are sown.

As we recall the good things God has done for us
 Love springs to life and finds a natural expression
 In our prayer and our praise
 In our service and witness.

Remember that couple.
 The couple that were drifting apart
 As they chased after their careers.

Well she was the one who noticed
 That things weren't as they should be.
 She was the one who started feeling
 A little jealous about him.

And so she confronted him.
 She told him that she loved him.
 And that she was afraid that
 Because of their good pursuits
 They might be giving up something even better:

They might be sacrificing their marriage.

Right there in the kitchen
 she told him that she loved him.
 And then she gave him a present.

What he unwrapped was a giant jigsaw:
 A 1,000 piece Ravensburger
 Depicting an outdoor hockey game.

She gave it to him
 and she told him:
 "We are going to do this together.

Every evening at 9:00pm sharp
 We are going to work on this puzzle
 Right here in the kitchen."^{viii}

And so for weeks they worked on that puzzle together.
 They worked on it despite the fact
 That they were both tired,
 that the light in the kitchen wasn't great,

ⁱ See Deuteronomy 6:3

ⁱⁱ See Matthew 1:21

ⁱⁱⁱ Deuteronomy 6:4 NRSV

^{iv} See Denise Dombkowski Hopkins "Exegetical Perspective" Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 4: Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ).

^v Denise Dombkowski Hopkins "Exegetical Perspective" Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 4: Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ).

And that pieces kept falling off the small table.

They stuck with it.

And while they did it,
 They starting talking.
 Talking and listening.
 Talking and listening like they hadn't in a long while.

They shared stories, old stories,
 Of how they got together.
 The gossiped about friends.
 They shared their fears and their dreams.

Spending this time with each other,
 Working on this puzzle
 Drew them back together.

...
 God gives us an ultimatum,
 Borne out of a deep passion.
 Make me a priority this advent, God declares.

It sounds like a threat,
 But it really is a gift.
 So how will you respond?

Amen.

^{vi} Nibs Stroupe "Homiletical Perspective" Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 4: Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ).

^{vii} William H. Willimon "Pastoral Perspective" Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 4: Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ).

^{viii} Inspiration for this illustration came from Andy Nixon "God is Jealous" in *Under Wraps: the Gift We Never Expected* 57