

This morning we have the Song of Songs juxtaposed with the reading from Mark. On the one hand a light and love-filled experience. On the other hand the dark shadows that dwell in all of our ever so human hearts. Which raises up some questions...

How do we cope with coming face-to-face with our own darkness?

Do we have a captivation with 'laws'? What about, for example, our fascination, even our obsession or compulsion to live by laws. And I don't mean just the laws of justice.

I mean our own personal laws of how people are supposed to behave, how we are supposed to be treated, how the world is supposed to work. Those beliefs are all our personal laws.

Have you ever noticed how sometimes these personal laws of ours might not even make sense or align with our actual beliefs...? Maybe they even get in the way of our living with authenticity, living a good life, living as a beloved Child of God.

Yes, for sure, laws give us a sense of order. They give us a structure so we know what we can expect from each other, how we can live together in a good way.

But... as Christians we have a whole other layer to add onto what laws we want to live by. As followers of Jesus aren't we compelled to ask: do our laws express respect and value for all? Are they based in love? Do they embody the mercy and justice the prophet Micah tells us God asks of us? Do they call forth love no matter the situation?

And does our adherence to laws come from the best of ourselves, from the place where we delight in others, where we want only the best for everyone, not just for ourselves?

Cause I'm sure you've noticed - I sure have - sometimes it's way too easy to go to that dark place in ourselves! You know - that place where we are easily slighted by someone's words or actions... Don't we sometimes find ourselves in that place where we assume the worst of someone else's motives or intentions without really knowing how or why they made their choices? Where we are so focused on how wrong they are we forget how human they are?

At times like those we are not coming from the best in ourselves. We are not thinking, speaking or acting from the God-heart within us. Maybe it happens this way because we're over-tired. Actually maybe we're not just tired, maybe we're *exhausted* from all the balls we've been trying to keep in the air. Or maybe it happens because we've been so worried about the health of someone dear to us or scared about our own health. Maybe we've been coping with chronic pain or body parts that just don't behave the way they always have before. Or maybe we're just worn out with the restrictions COVID places on our lives...

There are so many places and times we encounter situations that truly test us.

There are provocations, annoyances, and indignities to spare in our lives. So how do we make sure that our hearts are pure? What does it take to make sure what comes out of our hearts does not defile us? or the world around us! How can we make sure who we're being in the world towards others or towards our self doesn't go counter to our own holiness? And where do we find the inner resources, the strength, the love and the courage... to be our best selves?

One answer comes in the Song of Songs, the Song of Solomon - we are to immerse ourselves over and over in the transformative power of love and delight. We're to bathe in sensuality and playfulness. We get to restore ourselves. Choose nourishing love and restorative kindness, the Song tells us. Come into the realm of the Garden, the original Creation as God formed it, unfolded it, delighted in it. Join God and delight in the beauty all around us. God is calling to *us*, "Here! Here it is: LIFE! BEAUTY! Open your senses that I gave you. See. Hear. Smell. Taste. Touch. Discover my love with all of who you are."

The poet Rumi speaks it to us,

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. Don't go back to sleep.

Wake up, the angels are whispering it in our ears, Wake up to the presence of God all around us. To the presence of Love all around us.

And aren't there as many ways to love as there are people on the earth. So we this is where we have to be careful of rules. We humans are so tempted to say "There are only certain ways it's ok to come into the presence of the Holy." Cause we do love to make rules. And then we love to make sure everyone else is following those rules - you know, we're just like the Pharisees!

But that is not what God calls us to. What God calls us to through Jesus is love. Sensual, grace-filled, playful, transforming love. Love that wants only to grow and give, to overflow in abundance and bless with its beauty.

Each one of us has the just right way to do and be that. To be in integrity with our own true self, the true self created and blessed by God, to be and do and transform each of us in our own unique way. We were not designed, created - by The Creator - to place restrictions on each other. We were not designed in order to critique and judge each other. We are so much more, so much better than that!

So let us each one take care to feed our souls, nourish our spirits, stretch and open our hearts, so that we may arise into God's light and love, and sing out our song.