

Arise and come away (Song of Solomon 2:8-13)

We are human beings, wired for sensual interaction.

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The night before I married his eldest son, my father-in-law read aloud from the Song of Solomon before a crowd of our closest friends and family, gathered at our rehearsal dinner.

As a religion and ethics professor, he was uniquely suited to roast us via the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible. Surely his intention was to communicate his love and acceptance by slightly embarrassing his son and soon-to-be daughter with innuendo—an art form perfected by parents in every generation.

He succeeded on all counts. We knew his poking fun at us was a sign of his deep and abiding love. And I'm sure we both blushed. But the beauty of the poetry was not lost on me, even 21 years ago, back when I found the public mention of sex embarrassing.

Biblical scholars throughout time and space have allegorized the Song of Solomon; they have told us that the sensual images therein depict the relationship of Christ to the church or humanity to the earth. I'm not disputing these claims, exactly. One of the best qualities of poetry is that multiple meanings may linger among its spare lines. But at least one of these meanings is the one in plain sight—a celebration of the gifts of human love and sexuality; a reminder that no matter what our inclination is or is not toward sex, we are deeply social creatures who are called to live together in community and communion.

After nearly a year and a half of physical isolation from others due to a global pandemic, this week's reading from the Song of Solomon takes on yet a new meaning. "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone." These words convey the delight and relief we will feel when we re-emerge and begin to initiate human contact once more with those whom we love outside of our own households.

We are human beings, wired for sensual interaction. We long to see in one another's faces the very image of the God who made us. We need the touch of one another's embrace to embody the act of loving our neighbors as ourselves. We desire beauty—to taste plump figs straight off the tree, to smell the lavender that blooms in the field, to hear the turtle doves as they lift their voices in song. These acts seem no less holy than breaking bread or sharing wine.

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. These are the gifts of God for the people of God.