

Faith Mennonite Church
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Body & Soul: Healthy Sexuality for the People of God
Joetta Schlabach

Holy Longing: Love songs from God

Two weeks ago in speaking of intimacy, I cited the author Ronald Rolheiser, who wrote the book *Holy Longing: The Search for Christian Spirituality*. There he defines sexuality as the longing for intimacy, this “all-encompassing energy inside of us; [...] the drive for love, communion, community, friendship, family, affection, wholeness, consummation, creativity, self-perpetuation, joy, delight, humor, and self-transcendence.”¹

Our culture often portrays sexuality as something primarily physical and as a desire that can only be fulfilled with and through another person. But our faith tradition tells us that our deepest longings are most completely satisfied in our relationship with God, through Christ, the one who seeks us out, the one who gave himself fully in love to and for us.

One of the casualties of allowing our faith and spirituality to exist primarily in the realm of thought and intellect is that we fail to let God come to us in body and spirit. We fail to recognize sexual longing as an invitation to commune with the divine.

One night this week I awakened in the middle of the night and as I lay in darkness my mind said that I had no palpable sense of God's presence. But almost magnetically, my body pulled me out of bed and to the piano where I played and sang until tears could flow. The next morning I downloaded a Kindle version of the book *Love Poems from God*,² a collection of poetry written by mystics from various religious traditions over several millennia. One poem, by Catherine of Sienna, stood out:

Only if you join me

One more song tonight, okay
But only if you join me.

Once, when I was sad, I said to a
kind old priest,
“Have you learned any secrets
to unburden the heart?”

And he responded,
“Hum a favorite melody;
wine will always rise
to the top of oil.”

As I pondered how best to address the topic of holy desires, our deepest longings for connection, I concluded that we needed to hear love poems from God, to go to a place of the heart. Instead of my words in a sermon, Kristi, Tyler and I will share words from the Bible, words from several mystic poets, and words that you can join in singing.

¹ Doubleday 1999, p. 194.

² *Love Poems from God: Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West*, Daniel Ladinsky, translator. Penguin Books 2002. All poems cited are from this book.

Psalm 23

Yahweh, you are my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures you give me repose.
Beside restful waters you lead me; you refresh my soul.
You guide me in right paths for your name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil;
For you are at my side.
Your rod and your staff give me courage.
You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup brims over.
Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in your house for years to come.

God would kneel down

– *St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)*

I think God might be a little prejudiced.
For once God asked me to go
 on a walk through this world.

And we gazed into every heart on this earth,
 and I noticed God lingered a bit longer
 before any face that was weeping,
 and before any eyes that were laughing.

And sometimes when we passed
 a soul in worship
 God too would kneel down.

I have come to learn:
 God adores [her] creation.

Hymn: “Nothing is lost on the breath of God” STS 121**Ps 27: 4-5**

One thing have I asked of you, God, this I seek:
To dwell in your house all the days of my life,
To behold your beauty and to contemplate on your Temple.
For you will hide me in your shelter in the day of trouble,
You will conceal me under the cover of your tent
And will set me high upon a rock.

His lips upon the veil

–*Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380)*

[God] has never left you.
It is just that your soul is so vast
 that just like the earth in its innocence,
 it may think,

“I do not feel my lover’s warmth
against my face right now.”

But look, dear,
is not the sun reaching down its arms
and always holding a continent in its light?

God cannot leave us.
It is just that our soul is so vast,
we do not always feel God’s lips
upon the veil.

Hymn: “O breathe on me” #46 STJ

John 15:9-13

Jesus said to his disciples: As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

He desired me so I came close

– *Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)*

[God] desired me so I came close.

No one can near God unless God
has prepared a bed for you.

A thousand souls hear God’s call every second,
but most everyone then looks
into life’s mirror and says,
“I am not worthy to leave this sadness.”

When I first heard God’s courting song,
I too looked at all I had done in my life and said,
“How can I gaze into God’s omnipresent eyes?”
I spoke those words with all my heart,
but then God sang again, a song even sweeter,
and when I tried to shame myself
once more from God’s presence
God showed me compassion and spoke a divine truth,

“I made you, dear, and all I make is perfect.
Please come close, for I desire you.”

Hymn: Come, my way #587 HWB

1 John 4:7, 18-19

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. . . . There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because God first loved us.

Could you embrace that?

-St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

I said to God, "Let me love you."
And God replied, "Which part?"

"All of you, all of you," I said.

"Dear," God spoke, "you are as a mouse
wanting to [love] a tiger. It is a feat
way beyond your courage and strength.
You would run from me if I removed my mask."

I said to God again,
"Beloved I need to love you--
every aspect, every pore."

And this time God said,
"There is a hideous blemish on my body,
though it is such an infinitesimal part
of my Being--
could you kiss that if it were revealed?"

"I will try, Lord, I will try."

And then God said,
"That blemish is all the hatred and cruelty in this world."

Anointing

When we embrace God we find both comfort and discomfort, just as we find in our human relationships. Oil has been used in the Jewish and Christian traditions since ancient times to symbolize both joy and celebration (the oil of gladness) and also comfort in the face of our need (the oil of healing). We invite all who would like to come and receive a blessing of oil for joy or for comfort or both. Come, as you feel drawn by holy longing.