

September 2, 2018  
Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church  
Song of Solomon 2:8-13

### Ubi Caritas

Our Old Testament reading today is from the book of the Bible not often read in church, *Song of Solomon*. It's a different book of the Bible; it actually never mentions God. Some think of it as a long allegory. It's a long poem, a love poem. Like much love poetry, it's gushy, it's full of mooning metaphors, "my beloved is a gazelle..." The language is rhapsodic, rapturous, extravagant and particular in its praise of body parts. Perhaps it's even a little embarrassing. Interesting, then, that when we do hear from this book it is on Labor Day weekend, when there are often less people around. But you are around this Sunday morning, so you get to hear it, you lovers of church.

How are we to understand *Song of Solomon*? Here's a possible allegory, if you, like me, love to spend Sunday afternoon reading the paper. Think of the Bible like the Sunday newspaper and its various sections. In the Bible you have the history books, in the Old Testament that includes stories of patriarchs and matriarchs, in the New Testament there's a book that tracks the progress of the early church, the Acts of the Apostles. In terms of a newspaper, those history books are like the front page, they're about what's going on and whose doing it. Then there are Biblical books that are more like commentaries, they're written from a single, strong voice and they offer assessment and opinion—these would include the epistles and the prophets. These might be compared to the editorial section of the paper. Then there are those books of the Bible that are full of lists and laws, that carefully consider regulations and rules. I'm thinking those might be like the sports section, or maybe the financial pages. And then you've got today's book, *Song of Solomon*, which would have to be... the wedding section. I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I read the Wedding section of the Sunday paper, every week.

I want to tell you about a story that I read in the Wedding Section just a couple weeks ago, it was in the Vows section of the Sunday New York Times. The story caught my eye because the couple mentioned were married in a Lutheran church—Luther Memorial Church in Washington DC. That's interesting, I thought, being Lutheran myself, but even more so is how they got there. That story, their story, is basically the rest of the sermon today—which is also a little different. I'm not going to mention God, or the embodied nature of Christianity, or the suffering that produces endurance, and endurance that produces character, and character that produces hope, and hope that does not disappoint. I will let you draw your own connections. This Labor Day Sunday, a love story.

Frank Bordrey and Amanda Flores first met in a bar in Alexandria, Virginia in 2013. Frank saw Amanda and thought, "Who's this fine looking woman over there?" Amanda, says, "He was super handsome and had that Caribbean look to him, and I just melted. It was totally superficial." They chatted, discovered things in common. Both were divorced with two young children. Both were stubborn, liked to cook, and had similar senses of humor. They began dating, and things got serious, quickly.

And then Amanda got what seemed like the flu, it moved quickly, too. Amanda got so sick that the last thing she remembers is getting into the ambulance. "Please don't leave me," she told Frank before slipping into a coma. Her body went into renal failure, began shutting down, while Amanda lay there, unconscious, her condition getting worse and worse.

The doctors told Amanda's sisters that she would probably die, but they might be able to save her if they amputated her limbs. The surgeon asked them, "Do you think she can handle it? Will she have the will to survive? Most people don't." Amanda's sister said, "Absolutely. She has her two little boys to live for." And so while Amanda was in a coma they amputated, first her legs, above the knees, then her arms, below her elbows.

Meanwhile Frank, her relatively new boyfriend, was there, through all of it. He felt a sense of commitment, even though they had not formalized anything. He would go to the hospital after his 12-hour police shifts, or before, but he didn't show what he was feeling to the people at work. "I just kept going," he said. To handle his frustration and anxiety, he said he spent extra time at the gym, prayed a lot, and read the Bible.

Despite his stoicism, despite his being at the hospital whenever he could be, Amanda's family was concerned; so much had changed since the couple first met. Amanda's siblings and their spouses decided to talk to Frank about it. No one would begrudge him if he left, they said, he and Amanda had only been together a year and half, going forward she would always need some help. They said, "If you decide it's not what you want do it's O.K., no hard feelings."

Frank had no intention of leaving. Frank had other intentions.

Eventually, Amanda came out of her coma, woke up to find that her limbs were amputated. It didn't quite make sense to her; she could still feel them, though they were no longer there. Her body was so different; the life ahead of her, so different. Frank, who would not leave her when she was asleep, now that she was awake, proposed to her. Frank said, "I was just so glad that she was alive and it was, like, why are you going to wait?"

Amanda said yes, immediately, yes but with a caveat: She was only going to marry him if she could walk down the aisle.

Months of rehab that followed, and immense adjustment, and excruciating pain. Amanda experienced severe depression, even considered suicide. But she thought of her kids, and she kept on. Eventually, she became a mentor to other amputees. She tells them, "You have to let the darkness set in in order to find your fire." She says, "We all have to mourn our former selves, not only the loss of the limbs but the loss of the woman."

Slowly, Amanda became used to the prosthetics, became able to walk in them. And so it was that on August 11 of this year, before a crowd of friends, family members, her physical therapist, and her prosthetists, Amanda Flores walked down the aisle of Luther Memorial Church in Washington DC, walked down the aisle to meet her lover, Frank Bordrey, walked while the air was filled with the sound of singing, Schubert's Ave Maria. Later, at the reception, Amanda and Frank would share a first dance to another song, John Legend's "All of Me," a song whose lyrics include, "Love your curves and all your edges...all your perfect imperfections."

But back to the marriage ceremony. When it got to the part about, "Will you love and care... in sickness and in health..." and Frank said, "I will," the guests and the couple giggled. And there was also in the ceremony a reading from the Bible, from a gushy book of the Bible, a book that lingers over body parts, a book that is extravagant and particular in its song of love and is not at all embarrassed about it. The reading at their wedding was the first reading we heard today: "Arise my love, my fair one, and come away. For now the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in the countryside; the season of singing has come."

Love for another is something humans can do, and is divine.