

## Does True Love Exist?

Sermon for the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity

Song of Solomon 8:6b-7



*For love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. <sup>7</sup>Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.*

Love always requires everything and doesn't tolerate people being only partially present. Either be there completely or not at all! Though the reality looks different. Daily life quickly catches up with people.

Where once undivided love was, one sees that people are spread too thin. Where once someone had expected complete attention, now you see people with one eye on their phones and the other on the news while they halfheartedly talk with their partner. But love is not content with limited attention. That's how Song of Solomon summarizes love: "love is strong as death... Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it." Song of Solomon describes a love that can withstand a tsunami. But I don't know... is that true?

Yes, it's true! You only need to open your eyes and watch two people in love. They are ready to do anything for one another and to give everything to the other. No path is too far and no obstacle is too great to get to the other person. They are ready to be as poor as a church mouse or to move to another country and learn a new language – only for love. And such a love cannot be broken. You can say of such people: they are head over heels in love! And yet this love is also connected with great agony. Perhaps one or the other looks back on a love that is no longer there. Perhaps one or the other looks back and thinks about a partner who has died. Or thinks about how a love could have been and yet wasn't. There also belongs to love an unintentional expiration date, like everything else in our world. The human experience is that love becomes dull and old. It can quickly happen that we lose sight of the small and inconspicuous things of being together. Love becomes dulled. It is no longer strong and eternal. It is disoriented and weak. Love loses itself in the process of life and no longer finds the other person. Love no longer notices what the other person needs and forgets what connected them together. At some point, even good intentions no longer get them anywhere. Love is not strong, it is lost. All that is left is a kind of substitute love. Lonely people give all their love to their dog, cat, or canary because they can no longer find another person. Why is that? The reason is probably because love is conditional. Love between people always expects something in return. It always needs a reason... that's why lovers so often write sentences like: "I love you because..." And if this give and take fails at some point, then the love is lost. What starts out with good will and everything looking great, eventually becomes rotten inside and no longer applies because love has lost its purpose. That's why it can no longer find others, no longer understand, and above all, no longer respect. And then everything becomes rotten from the inside. It gradually changes its voice. Because love is no longer there, togetherness changes to conflict. One no longer talks about what he or she means to them but what belongs to whom or who earned more than the other. So, love freezes in selfishness. And it could have been so good.

Song of Solomon is about a love that doesn't become obsolete but one that lasts forever. It can't be wiped out by anyone or anything. On one hand, this book of the Bible talks about normal human love between two people. And at the same time, the book of Song of Solomon connects this human love with God and describes God's love similarly to love between two people who are head over heels in love, who have butterflies in their stomach, and would give up everything for one another. But there is one important difference. With God, there is no diminishing of love! No divided love! And no partial attention. God is always head over heels in love with us! He loves us so much that He doesn't want to leave us in sadness and depression forever. He loves us so much that He wants to prevent death from snatching us out of His hands at all costs. And that's why Paul writes: *"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:38-39). Why is God's love so strong? The reason is because it's unconditional. God doesn't love us because of something we are or have done, He loves us regardless! And that's why God's love lasts forever. And the wonderful thing is that this bond of God's love reaches us here and now in our lives. God's love is not far away! It is not someday, but now. We can have a portion of God's love now. And God wants this love from heaven to shape our time with others here on earth. We should be influenced by it. We should love as God loves – that is, even when there is no reason for love. We will nevertheless experience highs and lows in our private lives as well as in the lives of the community. That is completely normal. It would be terrible if we didn't have the golden bond of love. It would be terrible if we could no longer say: I'm still loved, even when I am feeling bad. When we can no longer hold the person in our arms who is struggling with himself right now. Yes, when we forget all of that, our love is like a little flame that is here today and gone tomorrow. And that's why it's worthwhile to take God's love with you. Love without conditions and love without limits. And that's where I have to start again from the beginning. Does that even exist? Can you love without getting something in return? And consistently?

Yes, it's possible! It's possible because God stands exactly at the spot where we are helpless and powerless. God is there where love grows old. He stands where everything seems at odds and hopeless. God also stands at the point where I reach my limits and can no longer love. Yes, God comes right there and breaks down all borders and lets heaven shine into our midst. And this is exactly what the Song of Solomon is counting on. We can say all of this even more since we have come to know Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's love among us. Jesus is God's love incarnate. And I stand there just as amazed before Jesus as before love itself because two things that don't actually belong together, come together here: God and humanity. There is equally on the one hand, our flawed human love which is always selfish, and on the other hand is God's love which is established and fixed in the Kingdom to come and shines into us completely unconditionally. It is a contradiction... just like the incarnation of Christ, the love of God doesn't fit into our understanding. The eternal God becomes mortal, becomes tied to time... and shares His love with us. Paul is sure that nothing can separate us from this love of God. That is what amazed him and so he also believes that this love can include us as well, and we can become more like God's love. Yes, you could even say that this love is completely natural. That's because we no longer belong to ourselves, but to Christ. Amen.