

Attics and basements are amazing places. They are like our personal museums. I like exploring mine every once in a while. It is like taking a trip down memory lane. Stored amid the dust and cobwebs we can find our buried treasures and recover part of our past.

Among my treasures in our basement which is actually a crawl space is a box filled to the brim with letters and audio tapes Jeff and I sent to each other about 40 years ago while he was studying for a year in Austria, and I was working as a teacher in Ohio.

Our love was fresh, and our letters were filled with the longing to see each other. And at that time before computers and cell phones, the only way we could keep that connection was through letters and tapes. The audio tapes were the best because I could hear his voice and play them over and over again until I received a new tape or letter. I can remember going to sleep at night hugging my pillow and listening to his voice.

I know it sounds kind of mushy and sentimental. And I have to admit that when we get that box out and ruffle through it we sometimes laugh at what we wrote to one another. But on a deeper level, I will cherish those letters for the rest of my life. Because when I read them now, I remember the passion and longing that I felt back then. My heart opens with a sense of new love all over again. It is like coming home to a love beyond words and lifetimes.

I think there is something universal about love letters. The first ones start in grade school with the innocent notes passed in class that read something like this, "I like you. Do you like me? If so, tell Johnny and he will tell me at recess."

I wonder how many of us here have love letters stashed away somewhere in our attics or in our underwear drawers? Or if not letters then some memento reminding us of our first loves.

I think lurking somewhere in each of us lies a romantic. Whether we read trashy romance novels, listen to love songs or watch sentimental love stories on Netflix - all of us at some level long for that kind of passion and intimacy in our lives. It is a longing of our very souls. The psalmist puts it this way – "As a deer pants for water, so I long for you, O God."

When we experience romantic love for the first time with someone it is like discovering life all over again - the air we breathe smells sweeter, the stars shine brighter, the flowers turn a deeper hue. We awake in anticipation of the new day and dream at night of future encounters with that special person that takes our breath away. We feel exuberant, full of energy, tittering on the edge of life confident that we will never fall.

The Greeks call this kind of love Eros - a form of love that is more than physical attraction. It is passionate and filled with desire. It is this kind of love that was the driving force for the

creation of the universe and continues to be that kind of energy that motivates us to seek beauty, goodness and truth – ultimately leading us back to God – to the breadth and depth of love in all its forms.

It is with this sense of newness I would like to invite you to listen to some love letters right now. Not Jeff's and mine but love songs about two lovers in a book in the Bible-- the Song of Solomon.

These love lyrics were written about 2,500 years ago but seem to have an immortal quality about them. Relax and take a deep breathe. Close your eyes and let these images soak through your very being. Try to be aware of how they awaken your senses and may touch your soul.

Listen to this passion that drives these lovers to find one another even in their dreams.

Read [Song of Solomon 5:2-8](#)

Pretty risqué. Not something we think we'd find in the Bible but there it is - an entire book of sensuous, no holds bar, erotic Hebrew love poetry found in the Bible.

Some of us may be feeling a bit uncomfortable right now. This is not the sort of thing we are used to hearing in church. These are not the kind of images we are used to reading about in the Bible. This may not be the sort of thing we even talk about in our families.

Besides the book of Esther this is the only other book in the Bible that never mentions God. It is the only book in the Bible that has such a strong female voice and is believed to be written by a woman.

So why is this erotic love poetry in the Bible?

The ancient Hebrews declared that "all scriptures are holy, but the song of songs is the Holy of Holies." They viewed this poetry as an allegory that expresses God's intimate love for the Israelites and Israel's devotion to God.

It is all the more significant when we remember that the holy of holies housed the tablets of the 10 commandments and the ark of the covenant in the temple. It was considered the most sacred place on earth, where the presence of God was believed to dwell. So, in essence they were saying within this poetry, you can find the exquisite love of God. The kind of love that cherishes, honors and desires connection.

These love poems connect us to something deep within ourselves. A place that we may have not visited for a long time- a place that may be like our attics -- full of dust and layers of cobwebs.

A place that cries of our yearning to feel connected and loved in an intimate unconditional way. A place that timidly asks the question do you love me? Do you really love me? Would you really love me if you truly knew me, my struggles, my fears, my pain? Would you love me the way these two souls love each other? Would you see my inherent beauty, goodness and truth?

There is a formula to romantic comedy movies that some of us can't get enough of. People meet, something keeps them apart and at the end they finally get together.

And in that process each person is trying to get their needs met through the other person. "If you could just act in this way, or prove your love in this way, promise me that you will never leave me then we could live happily ever after."

But if these poems are an allegory of God's passionate love for us then why are we searching for that sense of deep belonging to be met in others?

Maybe if we allow this poetry to sink into our hearts we can finally come home to Love – to know without a shadow of a doubt that God delights in our radiant beauty and invites us to be drunk with love. God says to each of us, "Arise my love, my fair one and come away."

When we have our grounding in that depth of unconditional love we can step out in this world in the fullest of ways – risking to love, to express our true selves in passionate ways through our creativity and sense of adventure, our sense of justice and our love of life itself.

If we can feel this sense of exquisite love in the depths of our soul we no longer need to feel shame for our bodies, our feelings, our earthiness, our life choices. We would walk on this earth confident, grounded, joy filled and radiant.

We would celebrate our one precious life as good, whole and beautiful. A gift to be shared with the kind of passion that young love offers.

Could you imagine yearning for God the way two young lovers yearn to be with one another? Can you imagine God yearning for you in that way?

During the middle ages the mystics, the one who devoted their lives to a life of prayer and devotion to God, read the song of songs more than they read the New Testament.

Their object in meditating on these songs was to learn about God's relationship with their soul and to realize the spiritual union between God and humanity through love.

Catherine of Sienna and St. Teresa of Avila - both Mystics in the middle ages, spoke of their relationship to God through Jesus with sensuous love language. They referred to themselves as brides of Christ of lying in bed with Christ. Of searching for his sweet perfume. Of being ravished by his love.

Listen again as I read from the Song of Songs for the mutual love and longing these two have for one another. Could that be an image of our longing for God and God's love and desire to be with us? Read 6, 7, 9

This yearning for God may be something that we are not consciously aware of. But I think at times we feel it tug at us. We come here on Sunday mornings searching for something. It may be love, it may be friendship and human connection, it may be rest and safe sanctuary, it may be a way to rejuvenate as we serve others.

All of which are legitimate reasons, but I think if we courageously and honestly look within we are searching for more than that when we enter these doors. We long for home – a primordial sense and taste of the infinite with us, within us, holding us, ravishing us.

- We are searching for answers to our struggles of daily living, questions of why we hurt and experience pain and injustice.
- We are searching for hope, for reassurance that we are ultimately not alone, that we are loved and accepted, cared for and upheld in ways beyond human comprehension.
- We are searching for God's passionate love and desire for us.

That yearning in and of itself, like young lovers, serves as a compass directing us to the bosom of God.

It is something difficult to admit our need and desire for God in this way.

To admit that is to acknowledge that we are not in control. That we are not a neat package others may perceive us to be.

We carry hurt, stumble with doubt and run from fear. It is almost too good to be true that we could be loved in that way.

But when we can sing these songs of love – our hearts are able to open just enough to invite our souls to dance with God – our true love. To love what God loves – which is all of creation and everyone in it – including you and me.

Think about it - When we love and let others love us in return we become changed persons. Our senses like those of the young lovers becomes heightened. Our priorities and lifestyles change, our thoughts are no longer focus on our needs alone. We become one – one in spirit, one in love.

Through the Song of Songs God is waiting passionately for us to say yes to the dance of life. “Arise my love and come away with me.”

“Come into the garden of delights with all living creatures and the earth that sustains your needs. Love others with that same passion for mutual understanding and respect. Treat

each new day as a gift --as another chance to express your true sacred self. Arise my love and come away with me.”

We begin again every time we walk through these doors, yearning to feel that depth of love. We do this through our rituals of worship and communion, singing songs, praying, listening for God's voice or gentle tug in the silences.

We begin today by dusting off the cobwebs from these letters of love and having the courage to let them carry us away.

“Listen, Love is calling out to you – “Arise my Love and Come with me.”