

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

June 20, 2021

A "Word Out" audio transcript



Prelude

Although I Speak with Angel's Tongue (O WALY WALY)
Emma Lou Diemer (b. 1927)

Welcome

P: Welcome, this Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, to Queen Anne Lutheran Church. Wherever you're listening, whatever challenges you might be facing, we invite you into this space: one where you can hear the good news in proclamation, spoken and sung; a time where you can be still, and know God is God.

We return this week to the second of our three-part sermon series on the Song of Songs. Since its acceptance into the Hebrew Bible over 2000 years ago, the song has been a source of controversy to Jews and Christians alike. Lift its veil, as we did last week, and you will find not only a vibrant affirmation of the goodness and beauty of creation; you will also discover, as we uncover today, a corrective to the subjugation of women by men, one that extends back to our first parents: Adam and his helpmate, Eve.

Greeting

P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: And also with you.

C:

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Repeat alleluia

P: Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation.

C:

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Scripture Reading:

Song of Songs 3:1-5, 6:1-3

A: A reading from the Song of Songs:

¹Upon my bed at night
 I sought him whom my soul loves;
 I sought him, but found him not;
 I called him, but he gave no answer.

²"I will rise now and go about the city,
 in the streets and in the squares;
 I will seek him whom my soul loves."
 I sought him, but found him not.

³The sentinels found me,
 as they went about in the city.

"Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"
⁴Scarcely had I passed them,
when I found him whom my soul loves.
I held him, and would not let him go
until I brought him into my mother's house,
and into the chamber of her that conceived me.
⁵I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild does:
do not stir up or awaken love
until it is ready!

¹ Where has your beloved gone,
O fairest among women?
Which way has your beloved turned,
that we may seek him with you?
² My beloved has gone down to his garden,
to the beds of spices,
to pasture his flock in the gardens,
and to gather lilies.
³ I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine;
he pastures his flock among the lilies.

P: Word of God, word of life.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon *Restoring Intimate Relationship: Song of Songs as an Answer to the Fall*
Pastor Dan Peterson

We know the story – or do we?

Genesis 2:4 tells us that on “the day the Lord God made the Earth” there was no one who could till its soil. God accordingly formed a man from dust for this reason, planting a garden and placing him inside of it to be its caretaker. The

man seemed happy. How could he not be? His life had purpose, and the surroundings were breathtaking. He was, after all, in the Garden of Eden, which in Hebrew means a place of delight.

We call it paradise.

The vision of paradise we encounter in Genesis contains several striking features. The man enjoys complete harmony with his creator. He encounters every tree of the garden as “pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Gen 2:9). He has no cognition of death or the toil of hard labor. Nevertheless, a problem surfaces: the man is lonely. He seeks companionship, and so God creates *animals* to suit this purpose, only to discover that none of them correspond very well to the man’s need.

From here, the story unfolds itself to us in a familiar way. God responds to the man’s lack of companionship by causing him to sleep and drawing a woman out of his side, a “helper” who will function as his “partner” (Gen 2:18). The two live together in bliss and harmony. Their love for each other reflects what the theologian Richard Kearney calls “the innocence of *eros* prior to the Fall” (*Toward a Theology of Eros*, eds. Keller and Burrus, p. 308).

The Fall itself occurs when the woman succumbs to the temptation of Satan (the snake in the story) by eating an apple she plucks from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, one of two trees from which God forbade the couple to eat (see Gen 2:17; 1 Tim 2:11-14). She gives some to her husband and “their eyes [are] opened” (Gen 3:7). They recognize their nakedness, and so they hide from God who punishes them after discovering what they had done. Adam will endure hardship and toil by working the land. Eve will undergo pain in childbirth, and enmity will exist between her and her husband. The repercussions of their punishment, however, will extend far beyond their personal experiences of suffering.

The sin Adam and Eve commit, the original sin, contaminates their bodies like a disease, which they transmit through procreation to their offspring. By putting their own desires before the Word of God, they introduce a flaw into human nature resembling what the biologist Richard Dawkins would in

contemporary scientific parlance call the “selfish gene.” This gene, this flaw, this moral impediment, will make it impossible for any of Adam’s descendants (that means all of us – see Acts 17:26) to live for others as God intended.

Adam and Eve’s misdeed not only prevents us, finally, from living virtuous lives due to our sinful nature. It also blocks our access to the immortality they initially enjoyed. Through Adam, sin and death have entered our nature and corrupted it. This makes our situation dire. Only Christ can save us. Only Christ can restore what was lost. Only Christ can heal us and clear the path to everlasting life.

We know the story – or do we?

Another Version of the Fall

The interpretation I just offered has a fascinating history. It begins with the Apostle Paul.

In Romans, Paul argues that sin “came into the world through one man, and death spread to all because all have sinned” (5:12). Several centuries later, St. Augustine, a Christian theologian and bishop of North Africa, would promulgate the same teaching, albeit with one important exception. Instead of claiming that sin entered *the world* as an enslaving power that compels people to act against even the best of their intentions (see Rom 7:19-20), Augustine maintains that sin has entered *our nature* and corrupted it. Only God can fix the problem, something we affirm when we sing “create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (see Ps 50:10).

Martin Luther will argue the same position. Strangely enough, however, neither he nor Augustine mention the fact that words and phrases central to their argument appear nowhere in the original language of the narrative. Even the apple is absent, at least by name. Rabbi Rami Shapiro explains why. “Many translations render *tappuach* [an ambiguous term in Hebrew for fruit] as ‘apple,’” he writes, “but apples are not native to the region. Along with others, I identify *tappuach* with apricots, a fruit that is both native and common” (*Embracing the Divine Feminine*, p. 70).

Think of how one detail – an apricot instead of an apple – can change the way we perceive the story! Then imagine what happens when we read the text even more closely, setting aside terms like “original sin” or Satan, which likewise appears nowhere explicitly in the text. This need not imply the absence of truth in Augustine or Luther’s reading, but it *could* create a space for another version of the Fall (and its corrective) that Christian theologians have overlooked for centuries.

Splitting the Adam

“I would never dream of trying to drive anyone out of this paradise,” writes the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, referring to the positive reception of a mathematical theory he rejected as false. “I would try to do something quite different: I would show you that it’s not paradise so that you’ll leave of your own accord.”

These words seem equally fitting when it comes to Eden, even before what Augustine and Luther regard as the Fall. Was life among the lilies and lilacs truly paradisiacal? Did the human race’s primordial parents enjoy bliss as we might imagine it today, or would they have been better off by leaving the garden even before God expelled them?

Rachel Adler, a feminist and Jewish theologian, might be one to suggest they leave of their own accord. “The garden of Genesis is an Eden without *ednah*,” she writes, a paradise without pleasure (*ednah* is the word for pleasure in biblical Hebrew). Think about it. The “luscious fruit” of its two most alluring trees constitutes a temptation (*Engendering Judaism*, p. 135). Above each hangs the specter of divine punishment. Adam’s role as caretaker might provide him with purpose, to offer another example, but what pleasure can he derive from the beauty of the garden when he must exploit it along with the land he plows for food?

At the heart of this “paradise” lies another problem – the relationship between Adam and Eve. According to Genesis 2, God does not originally create a man with the proper name Adam. Instead, God draws *ha-adam* or “the human”

from *adamah*, which refers to the dust from the ground (see Gen 2:7). Things seem off to a good start until God realizes that the crown of His creation yearns for companionship. God accordingly causes the human to fall asleep so that God can draw a helper from its side.

When *ha-adam* awakens he discovers something new. His situation has changed but so has his body. My use of the pronouns “he” and “his” signify the transformation. God has introduced sexual differentiation by splitting the *adam*, as it were, into *ish* which means “man” and *ishah* which means woman. *Ha-adam*, the first human, was singular and sexually undifferentiated. Now the one has become two, a move which solves the problem of loneliness while simultaneously creating the prospect for something even worse, namely, the gradual dominion of the woman by the man.

Not everything in paradise was paradisiacal. *Ha-adam* encountered loneliness; a prohibition hovered like a dark cloud over the center of the garden where the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life stood. Fortunately, things were about to improve, such that even Wittgenstein might have difficulty convincing the honeymoon couple at the heart of it all to leave willingly.

Paradise Lost

In the beginning, the man and woman presumably enjoy living in blissful ignorance and harmony. Neither knows their nakedness. They have no experience of shame. While *ha-adam* exercised dominion over the animals by naming them earlier in the chapter (see also Gen 1:26-28), the arrival of a helper “as his partner,” to cite our translation of Gen 2:18, suggests an egalitarian relationship between husband and wife. The fact that he willingly and without question eats the fruit she gives him despite the warning he *alone* received from God illustrates the relative power she enjoys in their relationship. That, however, is about to change.

When God discovers that the man has violated the prohibition against eating from the tree of knowledge, the man responds by blaming the woman. “The

woman whom you gave to be with me,” says the man, “she gave me the fruit from the tree, and I ate” (Gen 3:12). Notice what happens here. By turning against his wife and blaming her, Adam disrupts the original harmony that previously existed between them. He also sets up the dangerous precedent of scapegoating women as the source of evil, one that surfaces in the New Testament (see 1 Tim 2:11-14) as well as throughout subsequent Christian tradition.

The consequence of scapegoating Eve, who, incidentally, the serpent tricked and who, unlike Adam, never had the benefit of hearing the prohibition directly from God, finds its full and final expression in the punishment God inflicts upon her shortly before He banishes her from the garden. “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbirth; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:17).

The final clause says everything. What began as a mutually affirming, egalitarian relationship between two partners ends in the dominion of one over the other: the beginning may have been paradise for the woman, but now she has entered its loss.

Paradise Regained

Thanks largely to the rise of biblical scholarship by women over the past few decades, commentators increasingly agree: the Song of Songs offers the Hebrew Bible’s only corrective to the gender inequality that rears its ugly head at the conclusion of Genesis 3. Phyllis Trible leads the charge.

According to Trible, Solomon’s Song redeems the love story that derailed in the Garden of Eden. It does so by evoking the reader’s sense of nature’s rich and vibrant beauty – its sights, its smells, its sounds – as the backdrop of the lovers’ mutual delight, only now there are no limits or prohibitions, no fruit the couple cannot eat. This is truly paradise, so much so that the voice at its center (possibly God’s) proclaims, “Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love” (Song 5:1b).

The fact that the Song utilizes much of the same imagery (flowing rivers, fruit, etc.) we find in Genesis 2-3 reinforces the similarities necessary for comparison as well as the sharp contrast that occurs when we follow through with it. "In this setting," Tribble writes, "there is no male domination; no female subordination, and no stereotyping of either sex" (Adler qtd. Tribble, *ibid.*, p. 135). The man does not rule over the woman. He desires her.

The poem likewise affirms the desire she has for him. Its narrator grants her most of the speaking parts whereby she gives voice to the fluctuating rhythms of romantic love, the longing that burns inside her with undying intensity, the gratification she feels when her lover holds her tightly in his arms, the yearning that returns in his absence, one that arises from the inmost core of her being. She seeks him, she finds him, she dreams of him, she loses him, she misses him, she longs for him, she risks her safety for him, and she embraces him. In the process, she turns the hierarchical relations established at the end of Genesis 3 on their head.

Perhaps the most stunning example of a corrective the poem offers to Genesis occurs in our reading for today. Instead of bowing to a husband who would rule over her, she and her lover enjoy mutuality and reciprocity in their love. "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine," she declares (Song 6:3a). What an incredible testimony to the "all-consuming blaze" of love itself, the kind of love that erases distinctions and with it the hierarchies to which such distinctions give rise.

Making Sense of the Song for Ourselves

Obviously, many couples fail to approximate the egalitarian love we find in the Song, including our primordial parents. We should be careful. Sin in the form of control or abuse potentially "lurks at the door" (Gen 4:7) of many intimate relationships. This makes establishing trust essential. We should also be careful about limiting the experience of paradise to romantic love as the poet Johann Herder implies by saying, "When God created mankind [sic] for paradise, love became his second paradise" (S. Fischer, "What's Turning the

Wheel? The Theological Hub of Song of Songs,” p. 68). Such love can become idolatrous.

That said, the Song teaches us something profound about relationships. It shows us how both parties thrive when the love they share involves what Jessica Benjamin calls the “dance of mutual recognition,” one that has the added benefit of informing the reciprocity one seeks in the relationships one has with friends, co-workers, members of the congregation, or family (Adler qtd. Benjamin, *ibid.*, p. 138).

It reminds us, secondly, how important the element of *erōs* or desire can be insofar as it informs everything from our search for truth to our relationship with God. Do we seek God? In our encounters with silence, do we find ourselves reaching out toward God? These gestures contain the element of *erōs* in the act of faith. Without it, they would disappear, and faith, at least as the theologian Paul Tillich sees it, would become synonymous with obedience (*Love, Power, and Justice*, p. 31).

The Song, in short, gives us the opportunity to think not only about our relationships with other people; it also affords us the opportunity to reflect on our relationship with God. But how can that be, you might be wondering? How can the Song teach us anything about our relationship with God when it never explicitly mentions God? To that question we shall turn next week.

Beginning Again at the Beginning

For generations pastors, parents, and Sunday School teachers have taught many of us that the “Fall of Man” occurs when Eve succumbs to the temptation of Satan (the snake in the story) by eating an apple she plucks from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, one of two trees from which God forbade the couple to eat (see Gen 2:17; 1 Tim 2:11-14). She gives some to her husband and “their eyes [are] opened” (Gen 3:7).

We know the story – or do we?

My hope is that, regardless of what we knew at the outset, we know the story better now than we did before. Eve never explicitly eats an apple; the serpent

never explicitly identifies itself as Satan, and the first man was not a man but an androgynous, sexually undifferentiated human being. More importantly, we know that in addition to the “Fall of Man,” the story also conveys the “Fall of Woman,” one where the egalitarian relationship she enjoys at the beginning collapses into a relationship of subjugation. The prospect for fulfillment – not immortality – is thereby lost, at least until we encounter the good news of its corrective in the Song of Songs.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day

Although I Speak with Angel's Tongue

ELW 644



1 Al - though I speak with an - gel's tongue, my faith, my
 2 For love is pa - tient, love is kind, and nev - er
 3 For now we peer at dark - ened glass; our vi - sions
 4 The gifts are man - y, the Bod - y one, and in - to



knowl - edge all sur - pass, but have no love, my gifts are
 vain with boast - ing pride; love bears all things, all things en -
 end; our tongues all cease. In part we know, in part now
 one are all bap - tized. Be - lov - ed, share one heart, one



vain as clang - ing gong or blar - ing brass.
 dures. All things must end; love will a - bide.
 see: then we will see love face to face.
 mind, one hope, one faith, one love in Christ.

Text: Andrew Donaldson, b. 1951
 Music: O WALY WALY, English traditional
 Text © 1995 Andrew Donaldson.

Prayers of the Church

A: Let us come before the triune God in prayer.

A brief silence.

A: Holy God, you gather your people from east and west, north and south. We pray for the mission of the church throughout the world, that your steadfast love may be made known to all peoples. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

A: You laid the foundations of the earth and the waters are the womb of creation. The morning stars sing your name and all creation shouts for joy. We pray for your blessed creation, that it may continue to flourish and magnify your glory. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

A: You keep watch over all nations. We pray for countries experiencing violence, hunger, and unrest. Guide worldwide and local community organizations in their efforts to establish safety and justice.

Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

A: You are close to the brokenhearted and near to those in distress. We pray for those who are experiencing oppression. Liberate us from the systems and chains that bind us. Remove the barriers that separate us from one another. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

A: You dwell with us in this faith community. We pray for our leaders and elders. Grant them knowledge, patience, and kindness, that through their leadership you may be exalted. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

A: For whom or what else do the people of God pray?

A silence is given so that your prayers may be offered.

A: Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

A: Your love endures in all situations. On this Father's Day, we pray for those who are fathers or wish to be fathers, for those with broken or strained relationships, for those who are missing their fathers, and for fathers who have lost children. Bless and strengthen them. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

A: We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your abiding grace.

C: **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

P: Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

C: **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread
and forgive us our sins**

as we forgive those who sin against us.

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever.**

Amen.

Announcements

P: We thank you for joining us for this service. If you would like to hear other services or access the newest edition of *the Quill*, our newsletter, we invite you to go to our website at queenannelutheran.org.

Benediction

A: Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

P: Almighty God, the Father, ✠ the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
bless and preserve you.

C: **Amen.**

Dismissal

P: Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Variations on O WALY WALY

VII. *Finale*

Janet Linker (b. 1938)

About today's music

The tune for Hymn of the Day, “Although I Speak with Angel’s Tongue” (ELW 644) is strongly associated with the folk song, “The Water Is Wide.” The song tells of finding romantic love, but then losing it as “love grows old, and waxes cold.” Instead of the oftentimes fickle love centered in the self, our hymn applies this familiar melody to explore the enduring bond God’s people share – experienced imperfectly now, yet nevertheless binding the baptized together in “one heart, one mind, one hope, one faith, one love in Christ.” The organ prelude and postlude today are both based on the hymn’s tune, O WALY WALY. The postlude, a dramatic treatment of the tune by organist and composer Janet Linker (b. 1938), echoes the legacy of her mentor, Marilyn Mason (1925–2019). Mason, one of the most influential American organists of the 20th century, taught an astounding 67 years at her own *alma mater*, the University of Michigan, joining the faculty even before she finished her Master’s degree. The lyrical prelude is by the versatile keyboardist and composer Emma Lou Diemer (b. 1927), one of the leading American composers of modern art music of her generation.

– Cantor Kyle



Queen Anne

LUTHERAN CHURCH

Called to Proclaim God's Love in Christ for Every Person

2400 Eighth Avenue West • Seattle, Washington 98119

Mailing: P.O. Box 17029 • Seattle, WA 98127

206.284.1960 • www.queenannelutheran.org

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✧ *In Worship Today* ✧

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|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Pastor | The Rev. Dr. Dan Peterson |
| Cantor | Kyle Haugen |
| Lector and Intercessor | Carol Ann Davis |

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