

**Sunday 27 July 2025, 6<sup>th</sup> of Trinity, Parish Eucharist**  
**Song of Songs 2**  
**The Revd Dr Evan McWilliams**

The Church uses many images to describe our life on earth. We talk about a journey or a pilgrimage. We speak of running a race or fighting a battle. Often the focus is on direction, achieving a goal, winning a prize, defeating an enemy.

But what happens after we've reached our destination, found our promised land, won our prize, triumphed over our enemy? What does life look like after the goal of life has been reached?

I think often, especially in the West, Christianity can seem a bit dull because we fail adequately to respond to the question: what does it look like in the end, in eternity? The popular image is one of sweet little angels sitting on clouds playing tiny harps. Eternity is thus reduced to a vague cosmic sentimentality without excitement, without real depth, and without- really- any sense of human feeling. The eternity we so often seem to offer is just boring.

So let me present an alternative view: *I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love.* These words come from the Song of Solomon, chapter 2. If you have not read the Song, let me encourage you to do so; it isn't long and it is very beautiful.

The inclusion of the Song of Solomon in the Bible has sometimes been a source of confusion, and often of embarrassment. It is unapologetically a love poem, quite erotic in places, and not of simple interpretation. Its lushness has caused many a virginal theologian to blush and, subsequently, to allegorise. The Song, we are told, represents the relationship of Jesus Christ and the Church which is his bride. And that's fine, so far as it goes.

But I think the Holy Spirit offers us more in the Song than just a high and abstracted understanding of the depth of love between Christ and the Church. I think it offers us a personal reflection on the depth of Christ's love for you. Individually. And that is a very different thing to the love for 'the Church', which we can just about tolerate being presented in semi-erotic terms.

*As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons... His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me... The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills... O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.*

These are but a few words of conversation between the lovers in Solomon's Song. And they are meant, I am sure, to be heard by us as our words to Jesus and his words to us. You are his

beloved. You are his precious dove, sweet of voice and with a comely- that is beautiful- countenance. And he is to you the one whose strength and fecundity is like an apple tree laden with rich fruit. He is the one whose voice you long to hear calling in the distance: look he's coming, leaping over the mountains, eager to be with you. Aren't you glad to see him coming to your bed?

What I am saying, let me be plain, is that eternity with God isn't floating in the clouds in a forever even sunlight. It's the excitement of being with your lover who only has eyes for you. It's the flush of blood in your cheeks as they are kissed by someone who smells oh-so-sweetly. It's the rush deep in your belly, the rush of desire, the quickening breath, the rising heat of knowing that you are about to give yourself to someone who wants to feel you, who wants to touch you, who appreciates every shape of your body and will not let you get away without showing you how much they love being with you.

And alongside this passionate intimacy is perfect rest. *I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love.* This is an image not just of lovemaking, but of the perfectly contented rest that follows the delightful encounter.

What does life look like after the goal of life has been reached? According to the Song, it's meeting your lover- at last in the flesh- whom you have known until now only in words read and preached and passing moments of caress as you place the bread on your tongue and taste the wine on your lips. The one you have come to know, who loves you, is finally seen in eternity and you are the only one he cares for. Is it any wonder then, that the great and austere 12<sup>th</sup>-century monk St Bernard of Clairvaux breaks out into rapture at the thought of meeting at last his beloved Jesus: 'All the more therefore do I pray that the intense longing of those men of old, their heartfelt expectation, may be enkindled in me by these words: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth."'

He continues: 'A fertile kiss therefore, a marvel of stupendous self-abasement that is not a mere pressing of mouth upon mouth; it is the uniting of God with man. Normally the touch of lip on lip is the sign of the loving embrace of hearts, but this conjoining of natures brings together the human and divine, shows God reconciling "to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven." "For he is the peace between us, and has made the two into one.'"

The intimacy pictured in the Song of Solomon is that of two becoming one, two lovers, two spouses, two who have longed for each other across the great sea of time. Eternity with that beloved, our dearest Jesus Christ, as pictured here is wondrously full of depth and human feeling. It is rich with possibility for knowing and being known and, at last, resting soundly under his shadow having tasted of the richest and sweetest fruit of his presence.

Have you ever wondered what life after this life will be like? Have you ever feared this life's close without your being fully known and loved? Your life is hid with Christ in God, and you

are you loved, and you will know and be known, even as you now know only in part and see only in part. O come and taste and see- here, at the altar- how gracious the Lord is! Receive the foretaste of eternity even today! *I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love. Amen.*