

A Gift of Wild Roses Song of Songs 2:1-2

Introduction

As I walked across the campus of the University of Denver on a snowy day yesterday I yet saw roses everywhere. But there were appearing with an array of peddlers selling bunches of them as gifts for Valentine's day.

In the spirit of this day-I look at this text and find these two little verses about roses which symbolize relationships; these are out of the Book of the Song of Songs, also known as the Song of Solomon.

Song of Songs 2:1-2, says: "I am a rose of Sharon, A lily of the valleys...like a rose among thorns, so is my darling among the maidens."

The book of the Song of Songs, is basically love poetry. It is known to be unashamedly erotic. At least one early Christian commentator noted that there was a Jewish saying that the book should not be studied until the reader had at least reached the age of thirty.

This kind of sentiment about the Song of Songs is a major reason why the tradition arose to interpret its poetry as sayings about the love between God and His people, or Christ and His church.

More recently there has been a move among interpreters to draw together a way to read it in which its fullness can be appreciated.

So this is a celebration of human love in a divine context, and yet a description of the intense love between God and His people.

These two little verses can be understood as a conversation between a man and a woman who are lovers. Here we are entering a conversation in which there is praise for both of the lovers. We are going to build on the tradition which sees it as a conversation between us and our Lord Jesus.

Jesus is saying "I am the rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys"

What kind of flower? There is actually a flowering bush called the rose of Sharon, but is really not what is spoken of here, as that plant is a plant from Asia, and so not found in Israel at that time. Looking at the text, a translation closer to the original is more likely to be that of "crocus." This is a bulbous plant that resembles a lily.

Sharon probably refers to a fertile plain in northern Israel.

The crocus is a common plant, a wild flower that pops up and adorns the landscape. Here is an image of Jesus who like a free-beautiful-flower grows out in the meadow and brings to it delightful presence, fragrance and joy.

Jesus decorates lives. How many of you remember the song by Kenny Rogers called “You Decorate My Life?” A great song for Valentine’s Day! In this song his love is not only someone who adds to his life, but is the center of his life.

Christ in decorating does not do so as an extra ornament—just to make us look good or feel better. No, he is the one who brings the essence of beauty to our lives, with color and freshness.

He is the purpose of all of existence. He is the center of existence. He is the origin. The apostle Paul proclaims in his edited version of an ancient hymn:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible or invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

This truth about Christ is the most vivid when we are aligned with his purposes and his will for our lives. But it is so much more than merely being aligned with the expectations of our Lord and master.

In verses like these in the Song of Songs, tradition loudly proclaims that he known as our lover, and only as our lover is he truly known.

But this free and beautiful flower is also wild.

C.S. Lewis speaks of Christ as wild. With Lewis we venture into the animal world. Think of the lion, the figure of Christ in *The Lion The Witch and the Wardrobe*. I want to pick up the story when the children in the story ask the Beavers about this Aslan.

“Who is Aslan?” asked Susan.

“Aslan?” said Mr. Beaver. “Why don’t you know? He’s the King. He’s the Lord of the whole wood....he’ll put all to right, as it says in an old rhyme in these parts:

*Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death,
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have Spring again.”*

“You’ll understand when you see him.”

“Is-is he a man?” asked Lucy.

“Aslan a man!” said Mr. Beaver sternly. “Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the Son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea. Don’t you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion –the Great Lion.”

“Ooh!” said Susan. “I’d thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” asked Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.....”

Those who know and love him...know him this way.

This Jesus, the wild crocus calls us to a life with him. He turns to look at you and I:

We see this in verse two, when the lover looks at the beloved woman who is you and I and says: “Like a rose among thorns, so is my darling”

This is his gift to us. He gives himself to us. And when he does, we become wild crocuses, wild roses. What is happening as He does this?

-He names us. “Like a rose among thorns.” He recognizes us. We matter. He recognizes that you are to decorate his Kingdom: His church, this college. And the world: in your work, your families and in your relationships. The Apostle Paul says that we are the aroma of Christ, so that everywhere we spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Him.

-He calls us. “A rose among thorns” this sounds like he is being rather partial. Well he is. But this note of partiality is not over against others but instead a call to be a distinctive people. It is a call to wildness, to being stretched to new possibilities.

We do this as we follow our master. It is obedience, an obedience to the one who also says: “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” This means that this life is “a fit.” This life from Him which embraces you and I mold us into the persons which he intended for us to be, which he created us to be.

-He challenges us. “Like a rose among thorns” Thorns prick, they hurt. In following our master we’re not always found in the easiest places, or the safest places. But in good places.

We live reflecting the Great Rose of Sharon, ourselves called as roses among thorns. We are indeed God’s gift of wild roses to our world.