

Unmentionables

Song of Solomon 2:8-13

I had a repressive childhood. Sex was not something only meant for marriage but, it was something that was only talked about in a negative light. Sex was obviously something that one only did to procreate. Any enjoyment of sex was tipping the scales into lust, and lust was sin. That was why dancing was so dangerous, because it could lead people right into the act of carnal congress. The churches I attended during that time were obsessed with sex. Sex Education, sex on television, sex in movies, birth control, sex in society had to be called out as an abomination to God.

So, as with many other evangelical children I learned about sex from unreliable narrators. I learned from friends, jokes, and popular culture. Oh, yes, I learned a lot of interesting things about sex from reading my Bible from cover to cover as well. I certainly did not learn anything positive about sex in the church. While I think that church could and can convey a positive message about sex. Far too often we are seen as the puritanical fun killers. Not so with the biblical witness.

There is a not so subtle hypocrisy in the church making a rigid sexual ethic out of Biblical witness that is all over the place when it comes to the human biological function of sex.

There were two places I found celebrated sex in simple yet passionate ways. These were trashy romance novels and daytime Soap operas. I adored both. I found the trashy romance novel almost by accident.

I remember visiting one of my most ardently religious aunts Ginette. She was constantly in everyone else's business about whether we were actually being good Christians or not.

I remember a long argument about whether letting children dress up for Halloween was supporting Satan...but that is a story for another day.

She was a voracious reader. There would always be a pile of mysteries next to the Lazy boy facing the wood paneled television. It was the books that were piled next to her brass bed in the bedroom which interested me much more as a child.

While everyone was spreading yarns of the latest family gossip at the kitchen table, I would sneak into the bedroom to take a peek at these books. The covers alone were revelations. Muscular men with flowing blond hair leaned forward into their damsel. The puffy pirate shirts they wore always seemed to be missing all of their buttons, except for one near the navel.

Even though the stately Southern mansion and grand oaks with draping Spanish Moss surrounded him those eyes were intensely fixed upon the woman in his arms. She appeared to have surrendered to his burley forearms. Collapsing backwards her perfect hair flowed toward the ground and her eyes and body welcomed the affection of this Adonis.

I was not disappointed when I opened these books to read what was hidden inside. Yes, they were corny. Yes, they were written in a derivative style. Yes, they were titillating. Yet, I found their yearning for something ecstatic much more human than the robotic descriptions of sex that I found in the church. I must admit that when I read the Bible their stories of sex were much more exciting, more in line with these romances, than the sermons I was subjected.

I am told that my family stole this from Lewis Grizzard. Theft of words is a sincere form of flattery. I was taught that there is a vast difference between "Naked" & "Nekked." Naked is when you are doing what you

must. Nekked is when you are doing something nasty. The couple in Song of Solomon is Nekked, definitely doing something nasty according to my upbringing.

The fact that this one text from Song of Solomon is an alternative text and may be one of the few that the White men that put together the Revised Common Lectionary thought would be able to be read in front of a church tells you something about the content of this amazing book of erotic poetry.

So, salacious was this book it has been forever debated about its inclusion in the holy scriptures. It always is approved, but often with age restrictions on who could read it. The interpretation is most often spiritualized away. It isn't really about sex, but the Church and Jesus Christ...Yeah right!

A book of erotic poetry with no mention of God. A book that matches no other genre that is included in the Bible. A book that is between two most likely unmarried people is explicit and beautiful. I believe that the reason for its inclusion every time is that it is a superior poem.

I also think that its inclusion tells us something about God's revelation toward us. Even though I do believe that spirituality is a disciplined act, discipline without passion is worthless. Also, sex is good, to be enjoyed, and not degenerated by overly judgmental prudes with rulers and censors.

Ruth, Esther, Rehab, Hosea, Bathsheba, Jonathan, the woman caught in the very act of adultery, the woman at the well...we are often reminded that our unforgiving nature when it comes to sex is not always shared entirely by the divine. God's views might make us blush.

Do not assume that you always speak for God when you make proclamations of judgment on sex. More often than not you are merely relaying a culture in which you are a part. Not a definitive part of the Biblical witness.

What I do know about the essential spiritual nature of relationships with others, whether filled with sexual passion or eager mutuality is that their basis must be on something more than the initial spark of emotion. A relationship may start with the passion of Song of Solomon, but no good poem has yet been canonized that threads the years of struggle, betrayal, lies, joys, loneliness, sacrifice, anger, laughter, loss, a million comforting touches, tears, comfort of lifelong love. It is my hope that with every act of passion of Song of Solomon there are a million instances of companionship that stand the test of time, that will carry us through life so that we might experience its fullness.