

# “GOD’S SEEKING LOVE!!”

## The 17th Sunday after Pentecost—A Pr. 22; Lectionary 27

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Peace Lutheran  
Grass Valley, CA

Six-year-old Angie and her four-year-old brother Joel were sitting together in church. Joel giggled, sang and talked out loud. Finally the six year old (Angie) had had enough.

“You’re not supposed to talk out loud in church,” she said.

“Why? Who’s going to stop me?” Joel asked.

Angie pointed to the back of the church and said, “See those people standing by the door? They’re ‘hushers’.”

### TEACHING POINTS:

1. Spurned love is the basis of much drama, poetry and music. And it is the story of the Bible -- unfaithful people have spurned the love of a faithful God.
2. The “Songs of the Vineyard” tell the story.
3. God never gives up on us. God even (foolishly in our eyes) sends His own Son seeking our faithfulness.
4. The book: “The Sacred Romance: Drawing Closer to the Heart of God” by Brent Curtis and John Eldredge.
5. The story is on going. It isn’t “happily ever after” thankfully.
6. Action steps:
  - a. Take a look at your heart. Is God first place or are there other suitors?
  - b. Ask God to renew your Spirit.
  - c. In faith, do something. Just start by doing something!
7. God’s love always seeks us, no matter what!!

Tales of love gained and lost have shaped the imagination of poetry, drama and opera—Shakespeare’s “Othello”, for example, music—most any country western song today (by the way, do you know what you get when you play a country song backwards? You sober up, get a job and your dog comes home). Furthermore, real life tales of the tragedy of spurned love plays itself out daily in individual lives.

The Bible is also a panorama of love gained and lost. In fact, most of the story of salvation has to do with God’s enduring fidelity over and against human rejection. God never stops reaching out to those who reject God’s generous faithfulness.

Isaiah’s “Song of the Vineyard” is a perfect example. God, the friend, plants and constructs a vineyard with loving care so it will yield fruit, but wild grapes

grow instead. A distraught God pleads with the vineyard keepers, “What more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done?” Here the song turns tragic, as God will cause ruin to the vineyard. Behind this threat stands the unjust exploitation of God’s people by the aristocracy. Behind this song is a story of people rejecting God’s love in favor of another love (love of self). Behind this story are the emotions of God’s love spurned.

If the Isaiah “Song of the Vineyard” sounds a lot like the story Jesus told in the Gospel—recorded only in Matthew—it should. Jesus’ words are simply a commentary on Isaiah, updated to the story of salvation in Jesus. It is another simple plot. A vineyard is constructed. It is leased to others who are to share the produce with the owner. The vineyard owner sends servants to collect the proper share, but they are killed. A bad lot, these tenants! With seemingly obtuse logic, the owner muses that if he sends his son, they will respect him. Not surprisingly, the tenants see this as an act of powerless desperation and kill the son. As in Isaiah, the mood shifts. The owner will come, “put those wretched men to death” and give the vineyard to others, who will produce fruit.

These words from the lips of Jesus appear to have a very basic and fundamental meaning. It was more like a country/western song than an opera. The utterly illogical action of the owner to send his own son to collect rent is a perfect reflection of a long suffering and compassionate God who reaches out in the face of the most blatant forms of sin and rejection. The fundamental meaning is of a God who lovingly pursues a sinful humanity and finally in Jesus Christ brings an expression of the shocking side of God’s love that will ultimately spell his own death.

In context of Matthew’s gospel, Jesus is stopping to teach on his way to the cross. Jesus, who knows that he has come from God and is returning to God, is casting his biography. Jesus tells the story in simple, uncomplicated, ordinary terms not because we are dull and slow, but because Jesus wants to be sure we don’t miss the point. Jesus wants to be clear about a simple message.

That message is: God isn’t giving up on us. God hasn’t given up on the ancients. God never gave up on his chosen ones. And at no time in the future will God “give up” pursuing his beloved. God expects some “harvest” from our lives. But no matter how unloving or uncaring; no matter how many mistakes we make; no matter how often we turn away from God’s messengers; no matter that we fail to turn over the fruits of God’s work in our midst, no matter how often we are unfaithful lovers of God; no matter how often we miss the point. God still loves us, and continues to reach out, continues to try to get through. God still is sending other opportunities—even His own Son in the power of the Spirit—to help us see God’s truth in the face of our sin.

So, when we turn away from Jesus, when we kill the landowner’s son or commit some lesser sin, well, then God just turns that very rejection around and makes it into the cornerstone of eternal love. God won’t give up on us:

not then, not now, not ever.

Devotionally I read, “The Sacred Romance: Drawing Closer to the Heart of God”. The premise is: God is so deeply in love with us that even though our hearts are drawn to other lovers, even though our attentions get caught by more beautiful suitors, even though we dance with those who want to usurp our hearts, even though we do not know how to be completely faithful, God is always romancing us. The sacred is always making sure that human rejection and love scorned is not the end of the story.

Here is the Good News: God loves us so much that God just keeps romancing us, sending messages of grace – in stories, in sermons, in our everyday experiences. God loves us so much that God created us and made this world for us to live in as beloved friends. God loves us so much that God gave his only son to suffer death upon a cross. God loves us so much that he made sure that this rejection, this defeat, was not the end of the story. God loves us so much that the end of the story is yet to come, and it is more glorious and wonderful than we can imagine or understand.

The story isn’t over, thankfully. Thankfully, God never gives up. Thankfully, when we don’t “live happily ever after”, God is still seeking us in the “ever after.” God is still romancing us.

You know, when we look around, it isn’t all that difficult to find oodles of uncertainties. It is easy to get derailed by not knowing what lies ahead. It can be worry some and scary.

But recognize this: worry and uncertainty are false suitors, sirens luring us away from the God of faithfulness; deceivers drawing our hearts away from God.

God, though, is still romancing our hearts with God’s sacred promise and power. God hasn’t given up God’s claim on our hearts and lives. God still seeks to be our only lover.

So, what can we do? Here are a couple of suggestions:

1. Take a look at your heart. Which suitors for your life are you entertaining? Does God have first place in your life? Have you made a commitment to the one and only lover, Jesus Christ? Or are there other “lovers” with whom you’re having “affairs”? If so, realign your life commitments.
2. Whether you’re spiritually alive, dead in the water, or somewhere in between, ask God to renew your faith. Ask God for a fresh infusion of God’s Spirit. Renew your faith commitment to the one who loves you enough to keep on dying for you.
3. Do something in faith. Do something that gives God’s spirit a chance to work in you, through you or for you. Start somewhere, anywhere, God will use you for God’s glory.

God, romance us again. Claim us anew.

Amen.