

# Love Affairs and Other Wonders

Preached by

Rev. Linda D. Even

United Church of Fayetteville

December 27, 2020

## **MESSAGE: *Love Affairs and Other Wonders***

He created them with gentle hands, drawing mud, mineral and water together in wondrous forms; tweaking features; twining strands of hair; smoothing rough edges; shaping them to fit together; crafting their spirits to need him and one another; inspiring their minds to learn and to dream; opening their senses to explore the world. He imagined them bound by their humanity but unique in their being, each one with a splinter of his own essence. He set them free in the wonders of all that he had made, giving them gift and grace, opportunity and responsibility, and the capacity to know joy and sorrow.

They were his people and he loved them more than anything else he had made. And they loved him back.

They enjoyed all the splendors he had made; they offered him praise and sang songs and made offerings and took care of one another. They grew in grace and truth—until—they began to want even more than he had already given them; to think they had created themselves; to be more than human; to be for themselves alone; and to follow other gods. The other gods were easier; more convenient and more controllable – the only tradeoff was that money and power and isolation were little "g" gods—but they could pretend.

They were his people and he loved them more than anything else he had made. So he loved them more.

He set signs in the sky; and sent men and women who judged with equity; who spoke with wisdom; who reminded them of the promises and the possibilities. Once again they loved him back. They grew in grace and truth—until things began to go wrong and poverty loomed and armies marched and droughts and storms and plagues left people hungry and homeless and fearful; They began to forget the promises and the joy; they even began to forget that he loved them. Their little "g" gods failed them, and once again they turned to him, begging for a savior.

They were his people and he loved them more than anything else he had made. So he loved them more.

...

It was dusk. Her father was standing at the door with the village carpenter. From their glances, she could tell they were talking about her. She was excited. It was her time; her turn; she would be betrothed. She had never spoken to him, but she knew who he was. He was a good man, reported to be kind and would provide well for her. This was as life was supposed to be.

She was alone when the angel came. It would always be only her word—no one else to see or hear. She listened with her heart and she listened with her mind. It made no sense that she who had not yet known a man would bear a child, yet the angel reminded her that there was much in the world humans could not explain or control. But who would believe this? She couldn't. It would mean shame for her and for her family; it would mean the end of her betrothal. It would mean the end of everything she expected from her life.

She thought of the One who had made all people and who would make this child. She thought of his whole history with his people; the promises and hopes; the gifts and joys; the mercy and justice. She thought of her people; their hardships, fears and woes and their prayers. She grew in grace and truth.

She remembered that they were his people and he loved them more than anything else he had made. And she loved him back.

...

He simply could not believe it—not just her story, but that this girl, so modest, so quiet would have allowed such a thing to happen. He had watched her grow. She came from a good family; she was a good girl. He was a good man and would not shame her further than she had already shamed herself. Her family didn't need him to say there would be no marriage—they didn't expect him to go ahead.

He was alone, asleep in fact, when the angel came, telling him the girl's story was true; telling him that she had a choice and that she had chosen. He was surprised at the independence; at courage in one so young and a girl to boot. Yes, God had given them freedom of choice, but young girls, all women, really, weren't encouraged to use it. Somehow he respected that and her. If she'd consulted him, perhaps the answer would have been different. But she hadn't. They'd never know. Now there was his choice to make. He thought of her; her goodness, her proper upbringing, her quiet strength. He thought of his nighttime visitor; the message; the plea. The girl needed him, and so apparently did his God.

He remembered that they were his people and he loved them more than anything else he had made. And he loved him back.

...

She looked at him, their son sleeping between them; all quiet for the moment. He still surprised her. Not just that he had agreed to go through with their marriage—though that was surprise enough. She wasn't sure he believed her story—she didn't know if she did. But he had accepted it and her. There were no recriminations; he never suggested she should be grateful to him. If he had regrets he never mentioned them. He had been silent in the face of those who had questioned his judgment. He treated her as an honored wife. The unexpected trip to Bethlehem at the end of their pregnancy only confirmed all this as he shielded her whenever he could from danger on the roads, discomfort, crowds and scarce shelter whenever he could.

He looked at her, their son sleeping between them; all quiet for the moment. She still surprised him; this village girl. She took everything in stride; held her chin up in the face of taunts and insults; never defending herself. She accepted the discomfort—that of the pregnancy itself and the journey and the shabby shelter. If she had regrets, she never mentioned them. He suspected there would be challenges in living with this wife, who, even as a girl, knew her own mind and would follow their God regardless of consequences.

Their people didn't speak of love in marriage. It wasn't expected or even hoped for. Making a home, providing for one another, honoring the obligations of husband and wife; having and caring for children—these were the highest hopes and most basic expectations of the contract, but, he thought, perhaps...

They looked at one another, their son sleeping between them; all quiet for the moment.

She loved him.

And he loved her back.

...

Then the moment of quiet was past.  
With loud acclamation the word went out.  
The clamor was deafening.  
The angels sang "Joy to the World."  
God had heard their prayers and made this child  
who would be their savior,  
their ruler in mercy and justice, their counselor; and their peace.  
The chaos increased  
as the shepherds and their sheep ran in and out  
adding their claxon cry to angel song.  
The dark night grew bright  
Stars were tossed skyward.  
Far away, wise men climbed astride their mounts.  
So the story began again, and was told again: promises fulfilled, hope restored. The praise sounded, the bounty shared; new music born and murals unfurled across wall and dome; the poor were served and the people grew in grace and truth.  
For the One who loved them more than anything else he had made had loved them more. And his people loved him back.

#### **PRAYER FOR OTHERS AND OURSELVES**

O most holy God: God, you have indeed made yourself a child among us and with his Advent we know that the weak shall be strong and none shall be afraid.  
Today we pray for all the places in the world where hope is fading or dim  
(silence)  
and pray that through our ministry together we might be as stars that shine in the night of hopelessness.  
Today we pray for all the places in the world where there is no peace and where the only unfurling ribbons are barbed wire  
(silence)  
and pray through our ministry that we might be signs of safety and worth for the whole human family.  
We pray for all the places where mourning has not yet turned to dancing, where tears have not been wiped from faces and where the veil of death shrouds life.  
(silence)  
and pray through our ministry that songs of joy might be sung in places where they have been silenced too long.  
We pray for ourselves and for all those whose hearts ache with emptiness, where loss abounds, where doubt and fear outshout faith and hope.  
(silence)  
And pray that through our ministry, love might enter into each heart so that all people know your love for your whole creation and know they are welcome parts of that creation.

We pray with these words, with the silent meditations of our hearts and with the words your son taught us saying...

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day, our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,  
for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.