

**Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9**  
**Song of Solomon 2:8-13**  
*“A Labor of Love”*

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There is a story I remember hearing at the convocation service of my freshman year in college. Now, before I tell you what the story is, allow me to remind you that my freshman year of college was 20 years ago. Not that long ago, according to some, I realize, but I've heard lots of other stories since then, and I can't necessarily remember them. But this one has remained. Like many stories of its kind, what makes this story so memorable is not that I can remember exactly how it went (I can't), or that I can remember all its details (I don't), but that I remember it was a true story, and that I remember how it made me feel. The story was told by a professor who recalled going to Canada for Christmas every year as a child to visit her grandparents. They lived on a large lake that froze solid in November, covered over with snow in December, and stayed that way until April. It was cold, bitterly cold there. So cold in fact that you didn't go outside unless you had to. But the story went that she was a child and going outside was therefore a necessity. One afternoon then, while the adults played cards and sat by the fire, she and her cousins bundled up and went for a walk. "Don't go far," her parents probably told her. But this was Canada in December. There was 3 feet of white on the ground in every direction, and it was hard at best to always tell where you were or how far you'd gone. And sunset came early that time of year. Out in the middle of what might have been the lake, or a field, with a sky so dark and huge on every side that you couldn't help but feel tiny in the night, she couldn't see anything for miles. No lights anywhere. When off in the distance beyond them or behind them, they hear the faint rumbling of a motor and then the slight glimmer of a light. They watch it going back and forth before it disappears out of sight again, only to reappear a minute or two later. Eventually, she and her cousins realize it's the sound of a snowmobile, and the light its headlamp.

"I've been looking for you all for two hours," her grandfather said when he finally pulled up to find them.

"Luck must be on our side," one of her cousins said.

And this is the part of the story I remember word-for-word. “Oh no,” her grandfather said. “Luck had nothing to do with it. I was never going to stop searching for you until I found you.”

This is a Bible story. Across all its books, chapters, and verses, if the Bible had one story to tell, if it had but one line that stretched from the front cover to the back cover, it would be: “I was never going to stop searching for you until I found you.” And if there is any part of the Bible that tells the story best, it’s got to be the Song of Solomon.

The voice of my Beloved!  
Look, he comes,  
leaping upon the mountains,  
bounding over the hills.  
My beloved is like a gazelle  
or a young stag.  
Look, there he stands  
behind our wall,  
gazing in at the windows,  
looking through the lattice.

By a show of hands, for how many is this the first sermon they’ve ever heard from the Song of Solomon? By a show of hands, how many didn’t even know the Bible had a Song of Solomon? We don’t tend to hear too many sermons preached from Song of Solomon. Or at least I never have. This may be because in the world of biblical literature, Song of Solomon is considered X rated. It is poetry, it is love poetry, it is no-holds barred, I’m coming at you with every word and image I have to make you feel my love poetry. It does not do what the Persian poet Hafiz once said we do, when he called us “sad people.”

What  
Do sad people have in  
Common?

It seems  
They have all built a shrine  
To the past

And often go there  
And do a strange wail and  
Worship.

What is the beginning of  
Happiness?

It is to stop being  
So religious

Like

That.<sup>1</sup>

What is the beginning of happiness and of true worship, old Solomon might ask? It is to begin imagining God as One whose love can be neither defined nor contained by anything we do, because God is like a young stag who leaps and bounds over mountains, whose body pulses and whose heart beats at the thought of being near to us. Solomon might just as easily have written it this way:

The voice of my Beloved!  
Look, he comes,  
riding on the back of a snowmobile,  
crossing the frozen tundra of winter.  
My beloved is like a loving grandfather,  
or an old widow.  
Look, there he sits  
behind the wheel,  
gazing through the darkness,  
come to tell us, "I was never going  
to stop searching for you until I found you."

Sadly, I think, as members of the human family, we do not live as those who have been found by love. Rather, we live as those who are terrified of not being loved enough, and this fear does terrible things to us. It causes us to throw ourselves at jobs and promotions we never really wanted. To buy things we really can't afford. To seek power simply in hopes that getting to tell others what to do will help us to feel better about ourselves. To create a competition simply in hopes of making more of ourselves than we are.

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<sup>1</sup> His poem, "Stop Being So Religious," as translated by Daniel Ladinsky in "The Gift" (1999) NY: Penguin Publishing House, p. 119.

On Friday night, I was sitting on my back patio around a fire, looking up at a magnificent sky of stars, and feeling pretty good about my place in the universe, when my father brought up the Pale Blue Dot. Any astronomy lovers know what the Pale Blue Dot is? The Pale Blue Dot is a photograph taken back in 1990 by the *Voyager 1* spacecraft. The *Voyager 1* is an unmanned spacecraft that was launched by NASA back in 1977. Its purpose was to travel to the farthest limits of our solar system. In 1990, the *Voyager 1* had reached that limit, a distance of about 3.7 billion miles. It was just about to leave our solar system and to go into interstellar space, but not before engineers at NASA commanded it to turn around and snap one last picture. What that picture showed was a screen of almost total black, with a thin ray of light off to the right—the sun’s rays reflecting back off the camera’s lens—and at the very bottom of that very thin ray of light, was a small pale blue dot, almost too small to be seen by the naked eye. That Pale Blue Dot is us, earth.

It’s a sobering reminder that not only are we not the center of the universe, we are far from it.

The Biblical writers knew this, that we are not the center of our universe and that we would probably need require weekly reminders of this. It’s why, when we read the two accounts of creation in Genesis, one of those accounts has us being made from dirt. Not from gold, not from platinum, but from dirt. The other account says that it took God 7 days to make creation and that after putting up the mountains and stretching out the oceans, and after making the giraffe and the jungles, God said, “Now I just need someone to take care of it. To keep dominion over it all, to make sure everything stays in its proper place.” So God made us. It’s enough to make the poorest human soul think that God saved us for last because God saves the best for last. That we are the cherry on top the sundae. The ultimate prize in all creation. Except we’re forgetting that it took God 7 days to make creation and we were made on day 6. Something came after us. Some might say, something even better than us. What was it? Sabbath. An entire day devoted to rest. A day to sit back and remember that the world does not belong to us. A day to gaze up at the trees and the stars, to remember that each of us is just a pale blue dot.

And yet, and yet, the story goes that one day God was caught standing at the railing of heaven, looking out over the whole universe and squinting. "What are you doing God?" an angel asked.

"Oh, just looking."

"It seems you look a lot, God. I've been watching you. You've been out here every day for 16 million years. What are you looking for?"

"Something that got away from me. Something very good and precious to me."

"What is it?" the angel asked.

"Ah. There it is. See it?"

"No, I don't see a thing."

"There. That little pale blue dot."

"Oh, I see it now. It's funny looking. What do you call it?"

And God, very proudly and tenderly answered, "I call it Love."