

LFLC – August 29/21 Song of Solomon 2:8-13; James 1: 17-27;  
Mark 7: 1-8, 14-14, 21-23

The birds they sang  
At the break of day  
Start again  
I heard them say  
Don't dwell on what has passed away  
Or what is yet to be

Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in

Many of you will recognize these words from Leonard Cohen's  
song, "Anthem".  
Sometimes it is the Poet who helps us see the contours of our  
lives.

Walter Brueggemann the Old Testament Scholar who is both  
brilliant and readable, wrote a book about the Old Testament  
prophets called, Finally Comes the Poet. The great prophets were,  
at heart, poets, translating the promptings of God into language  
that all can hear and understand – that touches heart and mind.

And how much solace and comfort we receive from the poetry of  
the Psalms.

Linda will attest that I had a bad week of sermon writing. I told  
her this business is supposed to get easier, wasn't it? I looked at  
some old sermons and shared the thought of many ministers: Did  
I actually preach that?

Where to start? If you even heard a bit of the news, you are  
thinking about Afghanistan and the mayhem and terror there.  
You might have noticed there's an election going on and the

promises escalate as credibility wanes. And the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change issued a red alert. We either get very serious about CO2 reduction or face a human-induced apocalypse.

Now I know you did not come here to listen to Glenn's take on the news. But I did my theological training when Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian, was almost edging out St. Paul in the Reformed tradition. Barth once said that the sermon should be prepared with the Bible in one hand and the Newspaper in the other. I have always tried to follow that advice.

And so, too much coffee and muttering.

But there is a crack in everything. It came this week, of all places, in the Lectionary. Once every three years there is an opportunity to read a love poem. Tucked in there between Ecclesiastes and Isaiah is this poem, quite a sensuous poem that has always posed a problem for morally pure theologians. It was part of marriage festivals for many generations until a more serious school of Rabbis thought it much too sensuous. Surely, they argued it is an allegory of God's love for Israel.

The early Church followed this approach, teaching it was about Christ's love for the Church – or perhaps the soul's search for union with God.

But if you read it, it just seems like a rather sensual love poem. Here's the start of Chapter 4 which you could share with your significant other:

How beautiful you are, my love,  
    how very beautiful!  
Your eyes are doves  
    behind your veil.  
Your hair is like a flock of goats,

moving down the slopes of Gilead.  
Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes  
that have come up from the washing,  
all of which bear twins,  
and not one among them is bereaved.

It may not have the effect you are hoping for.

But it is worth considering for a moment the state of our hearts.

St. Augustine famously wrote: "*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.*"

**Marcel Proust wrote:** The *heart has its reasons* which reason knows nothing of.

There are some people who come to faith through reasoned consideration, but I think for most of us, the Spirit touched our heart.

This does not say reason has no part to play – of course, we need a reasoned, faith that can be communicated, defended. The Spirit puts the melody in our hearts as reason supplies the lyrics.

This is not to say our spirits are a place of innocence. In the Lesson from Mark 7 this morning, Jesus says that it is from the heart that evil intentions come and goes on to list about a dozen nasty outcomes of a heart turned to its own desires.

Jesus insists that it is not from the outside that we are defiled, but what we ferment inside, within our hearts.

Later, though, Paul will list the gifts of the Spirit – love, joy, peace . . . that **will** dwell in our hearts through faith.

You can see both the temptations and blessings that compete within us.

I have a friend in Ministry who tells the story of summers he spent as a youth with his cousins. His Uncle was rich and had a big cottage on a Lake. One day it rained and the kids were moping about, so the Uncle took them into town. He sent them into a department store and told them to get something to play with – they had 15 minutes. My friend saw a Raleigh ball glove, one he had been dreaming of, right size, wonderful.

15 minutes passed and the dad was at the cashier's waiting. The cousins had all manner of expensive stuff, and my friend? He presented a beachball.

As an adult he looked back on that day many times. Why didn't he take the ball glove? Answer: I felt I wasn't worthy.

Many of us are burdened by our wounds, our fears, our despair. They remain hidden or we may try to drown them in our obsessions or addictions. They are hard to confess or share.

Come to me, says Jesus, come to me all you who are carrying heavy yokes and I will give you rest. Learn from me, for I am lowly and gentle of heart and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Our Risen Lord is gentle of heart . . .

On my retreat I also re-read an old favourite, Henri Nouwen's classic, "Can you drink the cup?" This was written during his time at Daybreak, a L'Arche community in Toronto. Nouwen, the priest, scholar, speaker, celebrity was now simply a friend to people with all manner of physical and intellectual limitations.

He tells the story of Trevor, one of these friends who struggled with mental illness and depression.

Things got so bad at one time, that Trevor had to go to the hospital where he stayed a long while. Nouwen asked the hospital chaplain if he could arrange a visit. "Yes, but could you also speak to a group of chaplains and staff who would love to meet you?"

"Yes – OK - as long as I see Trevor."

Well, when Nouwen arrived at the hospital there was a room full of people eager to meet him – but no Trevor. The Chaplain said the group would meet, have lunch together and then Nouwen could see Trevor. Nouwen resisted, "Either invite Trevor to lunch or I'm not staying!"

Very well, Trevor came to lunch. But as people were eating, they paired off into little conversation groups – serious issues of health and wellness - but no sense of community. Trevor was alone. Nouwen suddenly saw Trevor stand with a glass in his hand. Nouwen worried as Trevor began to sing:

**When you're happy and you know it, raise your glass –  
(join in!)**

Guess what? Everyone stood, sang, laughed and the whole mood of the place changed for the better.

Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in

Television, the Internet, everywhere there are self-proclaimed pundits who claim to shed light upon every issue humanity is facing. Yeah, maybe on a good day!

God's light shines through the most unexpected people and events. A love poem, a ball glove, Trevor, the kindness of strangers, the generosity of the poor . . .the birds that sing at the break of day, the bells that ring, ring . . .

There is a crack in everything: in the world ecology, economy, inequality – in our Canadian pride in defending human rights, in the broken Church which is to live out our unity in Christ.

Now is the time for the light to get in.

John tells us that One has come from God who brings life, and his life is the light of all people. The light comes in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

The light has come – you are worthy – raise your glass!

May your hearts know the deep peace of Christ, the Lord. Amen