**“Love Song”**

**Sermon on Psalm 45:10-17 for Greenland Hills UMC 7-6-14**

**Gary Fox**

**Intro:** A sermon is an event in time, not what is written on a page. Each of us brings our own understanding of the scriptures and God with our own life experiences to church. All of this comes together with the Holy Spirit to create the sermon. It is a one-time event never to be repeated. In other words, we are all in this together!

**Prayer:** “Gracious God, I thank you for each one here. I thank you for your Holy Spirit, given to us to help us as we wrestle together with the scriptures, what they reveal about you, us and our journey together. We ask your Spirit to come and open the eyes our hearts that we may hear with new joy what it means to be loved by You. Amen.”

Barry Hughes is a United Methodist minister from the Louisiana conference and now an intern faculty member at Perkins School of Theology. He loves to tell the story of his worst day in ministry. He had just started at his first church and a young couple had arranged to have their infant baptized. Now, Barry is a big man, and the space this church had for the baptismal font and the communion rail was really narrow with a step down. The couple came forward with their baby and Barry stepped down and took the baby just as they had rehearsed. But he stepped backward and hit the step. At that moment everything went into slow motion. He knew he was going down and he thought, “They’re a young couple. They look athletic. Maybe if I toss the baby to them they can catch it.” And then he saw the mother faint and he knew he had to protect that child, so he held on and went down flat on his back. The father hurdled the communion rail and yelled, “What were you thinking, man!” And Barry, gasping for breath because the wind had been knocked out of him said, “The baby’s fine; check on your wife.” The father responded, “Oh, right!” and ran to his wife. Barry struggled to his feet still holding the baby. By this time, the father had helped the mother up and the entire congregation is staring with their mouths hanging open. And Barry says without missing a beat, “What name shall be given this child?”

The best part of this story is when Barry got home. He drove home thinking, “I’m leaving the ministry.” He pulled into the garage and walked through the kitchen and turns the corner to see his wife standing there with hers crossed tapping her foot and she says, “Well, that was awkward.”

Her response speaks volumes about the kind of relationship she and Barry have. Playful, respectful and full of love. And in his worst moment, there for him. In some ways, I think that’s why we love fairy tales. We love stories of true love and happily ever after. They give us hope that in our worst moments, love is there for us. How many of you out there are die-hard romantics? Come on don’t be shy, let’s see some hands!

When I read the scriptures in the lectionary for today, and read Psalm 45:10-17, I couldn’t help but think about all the Disney Fairy Tale princess movies. In this Psalm, we have a beautiful princess being adorned to marry the king. She is preparing to become a queen. It is a fairy tale.

Psalm 45 is known as a Wedding Hymn. Some scholars refer to it as a Love Song. In the Hebrew Scriptures, to the Jewish people, it is traditionally believed to be about King Solomon for one of his many weddings. He is recorded in I Kings to have had 700 wives. Can you imagine?! For Christians, the Hebrew Scriptures were the only bible they had for the first few centuries. By this time, Psalm 45 had become to be read metaphorically with the King representing Christ, the princess the Church, and her golden garments representing the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament book of Hebrews also quotes from Psalm 45 in reference to Christ. Why would a Love Song about a king marrying a princess come to mean so much to early Christians and what can it mean for us today?

The book of Hebrews is believed to have been a sermon to encourage late first century Christians who had just come through a time of persecution. As a result, many were leaving the faith. Most likely the minister who wrote Hebrews used Psalm 45 to encourage his followers that Jesus was indeed a king, the Son of God, and would be faithful to save his people. While we don’t face the type of persecution the early Christians did, we all still carry burdens with us and we need to hear the good news again, that God is with us and has not forgotten us. I would encourage you when you come to the altar today for communion to lay whatever burden you have at the feet of God and let Psalm 45 become God’s Love Song to you.

I mentioned to a friend of mine that I was going to preach on Psalm 45 and that it was a love song. He pastors a small Hispanic congregation that meets in a storefront church. He, like the congregation he serves, works two jobs. They can’t afford to pay him much, so he works as a hospital chaplain during the week. He said to me, “You know what would be a love song to my congregation? Working class folks have a difficult time seeing opportunities for rest. They work long hours and long days, come home only to continue working in their own homes, it just seems hopeless. How amazing would it be for mothers that work cleaning houses all day to come home and have someone else clean their house? Or to have gardeners working all day in the hot sun to come home and have someone else mow their lawn? How amazing would it be if the affluent people that have these services performed for them would go to these workers homes and do it for them? Would that be good news? Would that be a Love Song from God?”

What would be a God’s Love Song to you today?

How are we as Greenland Hills UMC God’s Love Song to the community we serve? We have been God’s Love Song to the people of El Salvador, the many non-profit organizations we help through the Global Village Market. We have been God’s Love Song to the Congo, to the Emmanuel Community Center here in Dallas. They youth are preparing to leave Saturday to join God’s Love Song to the people in the Appalachia Mountains. I have often heard Greenland Hills referred to as a place for “religious refugees.” We have been God’s Love Song to those who longed for a faith community but could not find one elsewhere. When Gary Travelstead and Paul Kibby were looking for a church that they could attend as a couple, they called a few churches in the area. And when they called Greenland Hills to ask if a gay couples were welcome, Nancy, the church secretary back then, said, “We’ve got some of those. Come on over.”

Heidi Neumark, a Lutheran pastor who pastored a church in the rough area of the South Bronx for 19 years, knows God’s Love Song for their community. At that time, the South Bronx was so bad, she said when her children would walk to school or to church, their feet would crunch the drug vials littering the streets. Working with community organizers, their church, along with a coalition of churches, helped residents take back their neighborhood by transforming lives. She jokes that if it weren’t for recovering addicts, former prostitutes, victims of family violence, and those who have suffered the harshest realities life can give, she wouldn’t have a church council. Transfiguration Lutheran Church was God’s Love Song to their community. She also tells a personal story of what it means to know God’s Love Song.

When she was young, she used to play in a creek behind her house. It had a rock ledge that crossed the creek and her parents warned her not to cross it because it was slippery and she could fall and hurt herself. But what do parents know right?

One spring day Heidi found herself at the stream wanting to cross the rocky ledge to get to the field on the other side where spring had brought wild flowers to bloom. Climbing down and up the other side would take too long. It was quicker to cross the ledge. Heidi got half way across and it was slippery. She fell hard onto the rocks and in the stream below. She wasn’t hurt too badly, but had to climb up the muddy embankment to get back home. When she emerged from the edge of the creek, she was covered in mud, blood and tears.

Her mother had been dressing for a women’s luncheon at church. She was wearing a pale yellow dress her father called impractical because it had to be dry-cleaned and was such a pale yellow it showed dirt easily. Heidi’s mother was waiting out back for her to come home so she could leave for her lunch. When her mother saw her, she never hesitated. She ran to her and hugged her, mud, blood, tears and all. pressed against that pale yellow dress. Heidi’s mother never made it to that luncheon. She never saw the yellow dress again. There was no conversation about disobedience or fault because that was obvious. All Heidi’s mother did, without a word, was take her upstairs to put her in the bath.

In one of her worst moments, that running bath water became a love song of God.

Go now and receive God’s love song for you and be God’s love song for someone else.

**Thanks be to God.**