

## **“Faith Matters” 30 – “The Intimate God” – April, 2018**

For many years, rabbis forbade Jewish young people to read the Hebrew book *Song of Solomon* until they were 30 years old. That prohibition was due partly to the book’s erotic language, and partly because no mention is made of God in it. What can you expect of a Biblical book that opens with the words “Kiss me!”? It is a direct and passionate appeal for intimacy.

Both Jewish and Christian readers have discovered that it is more than a sensual book; it is a parable of God’s intense love for human beings. The Old Testament prophet Hosea told of a time when Israel would return from worshipping foreign gods. He writes, “On that day, says the Lord, you [Israel] will call me ‘My husband’... And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and mercy”.<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah takes that intimate language even further saying, “As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you”.<sup>2</sup> And Jesus urges us to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”.<sup>3</sup>

The Song of Songs invites us to have not a one-night stand, not a heavenly flirtation, but a profound, all consuming love of the Creator, with an appetite that grows by what it feeds on. Because “God is love”.<sup>4</sup> This little book should be considered as a kind of Holy of Holies where the closest and most personal, face-to-face relationship with God can be celebrated.

Our faith is nothing if it is not a relationship – a personal relationship – a **loving** personal relationship between the Creator and us, between God and you.

In “The Song of Song”, does it sound extravagant to read of Israel calling to God or the Church saying to her Lord, “Your love is better than wine”? If so, it is only because you do not yet know the love of God. What we drink at communion is but a pale trace, just the barest diluted sip of God’s never-ending life-giving love for us all.

[<sup>1</sup> Hosea 2:16,19; <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 62:5; <sup>3</sup> Matthew 22:37; <sup>4</sup> I John 4:8]