

Christ's Call of Love to His Hiding Dove

sermonaudio.com

Prayer Service

By Rev. David Kranendonk

Bible Text: Song of Solomon 2
Preached on: Thursday, February 23, 2017

Oxford County Free Reformed Church

284793 Pleasant Valley Rd
Norwich, ON N0J 1P0

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/frcoxfordcounty

Let us read the word of God.

1 I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. 2 As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. 3 As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. 4 He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. 5 Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love. 6 His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. 7 I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please. 8 The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. 9 My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice. 10 My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. 11 For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; 12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; 13 The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. 14 O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. 15 Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes. 16 My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. 17 Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.

Our text is verse 14.

14 O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

Dear congregation, we opened the word of God to this book which is called the Song of Solomon but actually in the first verse of this book, it is called the Song of Songs. That's an expression that's only used there. The Song, you could say, of all Songs. The greatest, the most beautiful song. The song that rises above other songs and for it to rise above other songs, it must have a theme above all other themes and it has that theme of love and it is a love above all other loves, not simply of a husband and wife today, it may be a shadow of it, a reflection of it, but ultimately of Christ and his church, the love of Christ for his bride and as a result of that love, a love to him in return.

If you sense something of that love, then don't you desire it more than anything else? Already in verse 2 of the book, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine." You desire it. You also know your dependence on it in verse 4 already. He says, "Draw me, we will run after thee." You know your dependence on his drawing love, but you also may, at times, delight in it. You think of how she says in chapter 2, verse 3, that she "sat down under his shadow with great delight. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." What a blessing it is if you may desire and feel your dependence on and also delight in this love of Christ. If that doesn't fill your heart, then it's also a question why is that? A question for you, a question for me. And when that's also your burden, then this text of ours this evening is so amazing, that he still calls out in love to those who hide away from him.

So let us listen prayerfully to this theme: Christ's call of love to his hiding dove. Christ's call of love to his hiding dove. First, his hiding dove; and second, his call of love. Christ's call of love first to his hiding dove. Towards the second half of this chapter 2, it's clear that there is some distance between the bridegroom and the bride. For whatever reason, there is this distance and that is why her heart begins to beat in verse 8 when she speaks of him coming "leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills" to her. After a time of separation, he has come again to seek her out and he is there looking through the windows, through the lattice of the windows and he is saying the winter is past, that cold, dull, dreary, lifeless period is over. He says, "I've come to revive you and make it well."

And he says in verse 13, "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." You see how Christ comes. Christ is always the first to come. Christ is always the one who returns again. It's his love that moves him to come and you would expect that when he comes with this love, that she would immediately rise up and come away, but instead she stays inside and verse 14 gives that picture of a dove hiding in the clefts, in the crevices, the cracks of the rock. There she is, his dove, hiding. Disappointment. Will he go away? I've called. She hasn't answered. Now I leave. He can't.

She remains his dove and he calls her, "My love, my fair one," and therefore he calls again in our text, "O my dove." Why has he called her a dove? One person may say because that's a picture of gentile innocence. In Song of Solomon 5 and 6, she is addressed as, "My dove, my undefiled." There is innocence and purity there. Or the Lord Jesus says we are to be as harmless as doves, gentleness there. Another can say she may be called a dove because dove is a picture of beauty. In Song of Solomon 1:15 he says, "thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes." Her dark eyes were

beautiful as a dove's eyes. Or you can think of Psalm 68 where it speaks of the wings of the dove are as gold. Whatever may come to our mind when we think of a dove whether it's gentleness or beauty, this is certainly the language of love, isn't it?

It's the language of a bridegroom who calls his bride by his special names and Christ also calls his bride, "O my dove." Isn't that amazing? If you stop to think of it, you say, "How is that possible?" The answer is not because of who she really is but because she is his. "She's my dove," he says. "You are mine. I've made you my bride. I've received you as a gift from my Father. I have shed my blood to redeem you. I have given my Spirit to live in you. I have come to you. I have made you my bride. You are mine and because you are mine because I love you and that is a love that will not cease." That's why he continues to call, to woe also today. He doesn't give up on you, his people, and say, "I've called and you haven't listened and now I'm going away and I've leaving you alone." No, when you do not listen right away and when you remain at a distance from him and when you still even hide in your secret wherever it is that you are hiding, he's the one who continues to call. He doesn't give up because his love doesn't give up on you.

"O my dove," even when she doesn't come right away, and we wonder why doesn't she come? Why does it have to say, "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs"? You can picture it. There's a dove, maybe it's there on the street. Suddenly out of a doorway come a group of children shouting and everything else and what does that dove do? It suddenly flutters away and finds the closest place where it can go and hide and in those days the stairs were on the outside of the houses so it could hide maybe underneath the stairs and be there with its heart thumping.

It's in the clefts of the rock. You could imagine it's out there far away from home and suddenly a hawk is coming and it does all it can to get into the clefts of the rock so that the hawk can't get it and so that it can be safe. Or there's a storm that comes and in the storm it seeks that shelter there in the cleft of a rock. But what is this cleft of a rock? Where is this dove hiding? It almost makes us think of that hymn, doesn't it, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me/ Let me hide myself in thee." The dove here is not hiding in Christ, the dove is hiding somewhere else and Christ is calling them to come.

Where is it? It shows us that that dove is also a foolish creature; that it's not hiding in Christ. Hosea 7 says, "Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria." It speaks of Ephraim flying, as it were, from one rock crevice, Egypt where it thinks if it shelters with Egypt then it will be safe from the hawk, its enemy. Then when Egypt doesn't prove to be good enough, then it tries to go off to Assyria and shelter there. Why is it a silly dove? Because it's trying to find safety somewhere other than where it's to be found, in God and in Christ. There is another danger, a danger also for us.

Where are you seeking your comfort? Where am I seeking my safety? Some of us may have never sought and found refuge in Christ. You live hiding from him. You can think that you can find safety somewhere or with something of this world apart from Christ but it's a lie. There is no refuge apart from him. And even if you belong to Christ, so easily

we can seek refuge elsewhere, as strange as that sounds. Seek our help in others, in friends or family or doctors or office-bearers or books or whatever else for our health, for our support, and not God; try to find our comfort in their company and their counsel and not at God's feet. So easily we can trust in what we have to give us comfort rather than God.

Isaiah 28 also speaks of the refuge of lies. There are so many refuges of lies. The devil has lots of them, lies we would believe to put our mind at ease, and it's not Christ and we just speak peace to ourselves and when we think that we can manage and that we don't have to worry about the hawk or when we think that our own strength is enough to deal with Satan as a hawk, or when we think we can cover ourselves in our own goodness, in our own self-righteousness, and that so we are safe from the storms of God's anger. There are so many lies that we would seek refuge in, safety but Isaiah 28 warns, doesn't it, "the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." If you remain in any other refuges, you're like that dove that is there in that dry riverbed and maybe there's a hawk and he manages to get under a rock and he thinks there I'm safe. Little does he realize that there's been rain further away and that water is coming down that dry riverbed and soon it's going to come over him.

It's saying every refuge that's not Christ is going to prove a refuge of lies which isn't going to help you or keep you safe and that's why the Lord Jesus comes. That's why he comes tonight and says, "Where are you? Where are you? Are you hiding from me? Why are you a distance from me?" Wherever you are, he calls out. "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs." He still calls out and he says, "Come."

Again, we can wonder why doesn't that little dove come right away? Why would it remain hiding in that dark crevice. There's no food there. There's no joy giving light there. There's no water there. There's no delightful company there. Why would it remain there? That can be a question also for us. Why would any of us remain at a distance from Christ whether in an absolute sense or whether as one that's wandered away again when Christ says, "Come"?

Why? Could it be that you hear that call, "O my dove, come," and you think, "But that's not me?" You look at yourself and you hear that expression, "My love, my fair one," and you say, "He cannot mean me." You look at yourself and you don't see fairness and beauty and you don't see such loveliness in yourself and so you think, "That call, 'My love, my fair one,' cannot be addressed to me." You think it a presumption to imagine that he would be calling you. You think he must be calling others. He must be calling such godly people, such people full of love and that's not who you are and so he's not calling you and so you stay there in that crevice even when he calls, "Come," even when he calls not just his dove but even sinners to come to him, when he calls the burdened and heavy-laden to come to him thinking, "It's not me."

Or is it because you're afraid? You think, "I don't fit with him. He's altogether lovely, pure and undefiled, nothing lacking, but I am so opposite of him. I'm so even unlike a dove in its gentleness and meekness and uprightness and beauty and if were to come out

and to come before him with all the dust of that crevice upon my feathers and come in the light of him, then he would not want me." And there is that fear that he will not receive me. You hear that call. You're afraid.

Or is it that you're ashamed? You think of what you've done, think of how you've lived. You're like that bride who is unfaithful to her husband. She hears his voice, "Come," and she thinks, "How can I come? How can I look him in the eye after what I've done?" So that's shame as you look back, "What have I been? What have I done? Who am I to look at him?" It can be so painful.

He calls out, yet, in the fullness and freeness and faithfulness of his love. His Gospel declares the most glorious things about the eternal love of the Father that chooses and the sacrificial love of the Son that gave himself and the amazing love of the Spirit to come and to dwell in a sinful bride. It speaks of this love but there's something that keeps you from surrendering to it or enjoying it, something that keeps you from rejoicing in it tonight. You say, "If only it was true. If only it was me. If only..." What is it? One who hears the most glorious things of grace but you may still hide in that cleft of the rock and not dare come.

Whatever you think, whatever you say, however you feel tonight, there is a second point: Christ's call of love to his hiding dove. Christ's call of love. In this passage he comes to find his dove because she's still his dove however hesitant, however ashamed, however fearful, however trembling she may be, however unable she may feel to come to him. He seeks her out and says, "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice." In that call we, again, hear his love, his love that hasn't diminished even though she has hidden away. His desire for her is as strong as it has ever been even though hers may be weak.

Love always makes you want to be with the one you love. He, this is the amazing thing, he cannot do without her and that's why he says, "Let me hear thy voice." And sitting there you can think, "My voice? What is my voice? I can only complain about myself, only have reason to mourn." And that's what doves are known for, aren't they, for mourning? We have in our area mourning doves and they make those hoo-hoo-hoo sounds. They mourn. In the Bible, it also speaks of the doves' mourning. In Ezekiel 7 it says they, "shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity."

Does the Lord want to hear such mourning cries? Is that a pleasant sound to him? Wouldn't he much rather hear all the praises and the adorations of all the angels before his presence? And if he has all those angels to praise and glorify him in perfection, would he want to hear that mourning voice that's troubled about its sin? Psalm 51, "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." The Lord takes pleasure even in that mourning voice from a mourning heart. It's music to Christ's ears. He says, "Let me hear your voice. Do not be silent. Bring it to me. Confess your complaint to me. Confess your wrong to me. Confess everything to me. Don't keep silence. Don't just think about it, don't just talk about it to others, let me hear your voice," he says. You see, when we're

silent, we have no base. Remember David in Psalm 32, he says, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."

As long as you hide away, there is no peace, there is no rest, but he says, "Come. Let me hear your voice. Tell me again." Like the Psalmist in Psalm 32 when he says when I confessed transgression, in my sin I did not hide and I acknowledged my transgression, then God forgave. He says, "Tell me. Let me hear your voice of confession, of confession of sin. Let me hear your voice with your requests. What are they tonight? What are your requests? What are your desires? Tell them." He says, "Let me hear your voice. Pray to me. Don't ignore me." Have you been doing so today or have you been praying? Whatever it is today, tonight, he says, "Let me hear your voice. O my dove, let me hear thy voice." That's actually a call for everyone whether you consider yourself his dove or not. He calls you to call upon him.

Today he says to his dove in that dark crevice, "Let me hear thy voice. Tell those deepest desires. What grace do you need? What help do you need? What can I do for you? Tell me." Don't you hear the love and the mercy and the grace of God in those words? He desires to hear that voice because he desires needy cries that he may supply. What else does he desire to hear? Isn't it also that confession when he comes and he says, "Lovest thou me? Let me hear it. Let me hear it. Lovest thou me?" And then you say, "Lord, thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love thee."

He says, "Let me hear thy voice," and he also says, "Let me see thou countenance." He desires to see your countenance, that means your face. You say, "My face? That dove emerging from that dusty crevice, that face covered in dust? See my face?" With Ezra there's reason to say, "I must blush and hang my head down because there's no beauty in my face." Listen, "Let me see thy countenance." He says, "I want to see you and to see your face." That's an expression of your soul. Your face can tell even more than words can tell. When he says, "Let me see your face," he's saying, "Come to me and bring everything before me. Keep nothing back from me. Show your face. Show your whole self. Show. Come before me. Let me see thy face so that nothing would be hidden, nothing would be between me and thee."

"Let me see thy face" also has the sense of, "I desire to let you see me again." We don't see him as long as we remain in that dark crevice and you can lament you don't see him but he says, "Come to me and you will see who I am in my beauty and in my love. Come, let me see thy face and your face will see my face. You'll see who I am again and you will see upon my face what is in my heart. That is such a love and such a grace that when you see that grace in my eyes, then all your fears will fade away. How can we be together? Then all your worries will be gone."

Love casts out fear, John says, and that love flows only from a sight of my love. He says, "Let me see thy face. Let thine eyes see my face." That doesn't mean just poke your head out of the crevice and look in his direction but it's to come to him because he desires to have his dove with him. He desires to have his bride with him. He desires that fellowship. He wants to be with his bride. Today the Lord Jesus still declares his desire for his bride

with him spiritually. His love longs for it. His desire is for it far stronger than your desire is for him. His desire makes him call out, "Let me see thy face." It's also that same desire that he has when next in some days he will have a table and he will set it before the congregation and he will say, "O my dove, let me not only hear thy voice but let me see thy face that we may have fellowship together. With desire have I desired this." You look at your weak desire but hear the desire in his voice.

All those obstacles can come up but listen to his call. He says, "Let me hear thy voice. Let me see thy face." That that call would break down all those hesitations and all those obstacles. His desire is greater than all you think and feel. Is he not sincere when he calls? Does he not mean when he says, "Let me hear thy voice," you think he doesn't know what your voice is like? What your heart is like? What your face is like? What your being is like? He knows everything. We can't hide anything from him. He knows it all yet he says, "Come, let me see thy face."

Clearly there is no love like his. There must be a reason why this Song is called the Song of Songs because there is no love like the love of Christ. You say, "I can't understand it." Neither can I. No one can but it's true. He desires to have a people with him, to have fellowship with him as his dove, as his bride. He calls so that you would be filled with amazement at his love and if tonight he uses this very call to reach you where you are thinking, "I am not his dove. He is not calling me," and yet draws you to himself and makes you his dove to know his love, then only wonder and amazement will be left at his love.

The end of the text only increases that wonder. "O my dove, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." That means beautiful. How can that be? The dove hesitates because she doesn't find her voice sweet and she doesn't find her face beautiful. That's why she's there. She knows what she is and that's how it is with all those who belong to Christ. Christ has to show you who you are. The words of the Lord are that you've come to loath and humble yourself before God. You can still be content with your own beauty, you can still be content with the goodness even of your own voice and of your own prayers and think that God should hear you because you pray so well, then you're a stranger of your own heart and you're a stranger of this God.

If you know something of yourself, then you know that you are not beautiful of yourself before God. You've looked at yourself in the mirror of God's love and you've seen sin and sin and sin and maybe also in these past days you've seen more and more sin and yet Christ calls out to his dove, "Sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely." It's beautiful. How can Christ say this? This is simply the language of love. Love can make you see beauty in something which others see no beauty in. "Oh, it's so beautiful," because you love it but others look at it and say, "So what?" Is that how it is?

Clearly this is love speaking and it is his love that sees a beauty in his bride. It's because he loves her that he sees a beauty in her but is there no beauty, real beauty in his bride, then? Is it just love that makes him say that? If you belong to Christ, you do have a

beauty, it's the beauty that we pray for in Psalm 90 which we began this year with, "let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us."

When Christ saves you, he doesn't leave you lying there in your filth, disease, and covered with sores from head to toe. He cleanses. He renews. He doesn't leave you the same because he gives you his Spirit. The Spirit. Remember when the Lord Jesus was baptized, he was pictured as a dove, wasn't he? An undefiled, innocent, gentle, beautiful dove, and when that Holy Spirit as a dove enters your heart, then he also applies that blood of Christ that cleanses you, and he also shows you the beauty of Christ that makes you look unto the Lord Jesus Christ with love, and then the Lord Jesus, he sees that love in your eyes as the fruit of his own grace in you, of the work of his own Spirit in you, and he sees that beautiful grace. And when he cleanses your lips to cry to God, then he sees something of his own grace in you, and when he works that sorrow over sin or that joy in God, then he sees in your face something of his own grace in you, and that is beautiful, his grace in his bride.

If that heavenly dove is living within you and working within you, then Christ can say, "My dove, thy voice is sweet. Thy face is beautiful." But maybe someone says, "That's exactly the problem, I look at myself and the first thing I see is not the beautiful grace of the Holy Spirit but I see so much of the opposite and then I wonder and then I think he cannot be calling me when he says, 'Thy face is beautiful and thy voice is sweet.' The end of my prayers I have to confess, 'O Lord, forgive even my sin in praying' because it's not from the heart as it ought, it's not full of confidence as it ought, it's not full of submission as it ought.' My voice is not so beautiful." And yet he calls, "Come. Let me see thy face again."

You say, "But it's so mixed with sin." What does he ultimately see that is so beautiful when he looks upon his bride? It's his own beauty covering her. It's what we heard last Sunday about Joshua standing there and those filthy garments taken away and he was covered from the head to his feet with a beautiful robe and that is a picture of what the Lord Jesus has come to give. He is the one of perfect beauty. He is the one whose whole heart was so beautiful because his heart was filled with perfect love throughout his entire life, and his whole life was a beautiful life because all he ever did was only ever good and he always glorified the Father, he always honored him. He has a beauty in his human nature which is so perfect, so indescribable and he was that.

His beauty was actually that of a beautiful garment that he covers his bride with so that he may look at her and say, "Thou art all fair. There is no spot in thee." No spot. You see yourself full of spots but he then sees you as no spot because he's covered you with his own beauty. That's the wonder of justification that we've been hearing about and that is what gives hope. You say, "God can see no beauty in me. I'm a defiled sinner." The Psalmist says, "When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away." Why? So that you would have no confidence in your beauty and so that you would come to prize that beauty of Christ as a covering, to be clothed with him.

In his sinless love he calls those, "You who don't find yourself even as his dove, come now. Let us reason together. Thou your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Clean. White. Beautiful." This is the God who comes to us. This is the Christ who comes to us and if you're yet hiding away, hear his voice. He calls. Is it really so? You say, "I can't understand it." Neither can I and we never will to all eternity but it's true because his love is so great, so deep, so faithful for his silly dove without heart. He desires to show that love again. "O my dove, let me see thy face. Let me hear thy voice." The liberty, the power to come is in that call to you which reveals his sinless love. This is a love that calls in order to give all to you who have nothing. He calls in order to magnify not your love but his love, filled with his love, to be sheltered in his love, that shelter that has been opened up through his own blood. There he displays his love in his own blood. So he calls, "O my dove, let me see thy face. Let me hear thy voice." Amen.