

**Sunday 5 May 2024**  
**Evensong on the Sixth Sunday After Easter**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Song of Solomon 4.16-5.5, 8.6-7)**

**NT: Revelation 3:14-end**

We are gathered here this evening on the first Sunday of the month of May, known as Mary's month and lesser known as my birthday month. We are still in Easter and looking forward to Ascension Day on Thursday. Today we had the privilege of seeing Fr Steven Shakespeare licensed here as Assistant Priest. In his sermon, Fr Steven referred to the hugely popular series Father Ted. Meanwhile my reference to popular TV is the Eurovision Song Contest. This is another event to look forward to in the month of May and who remembers last year, the wonderful reception that Liverpool gave to all visitors enjoying the Eurovision Song Contest here.

Our readings tonight are very interesting and range from passionate exchanges to a lukewarm church in Laodicea. The poem from the Song of Solomon gives us an insight into the exchanges between two lovers. It is a celebration of desire between two people and the metaphors used are not that subtle. The passion is intense, and this poem should be recognised as a celebration of sexual love between two people. We receive an interesting contrast from our New Testament reading. In Revelation chapter one, John is commanded to write to the seven churches. The reading that we have heard is to the seventh church, Laodicea.

This church in Laodicea is neither hot nor cold. There is a cool indifference to God, which is evidenced by a lukewarm attitude in the way they live. If we can just be honest, do we ever just put God to one side because we feel that we have all the answers? Do we feel that we have got everything worked out? Do we forget our deep need for God, for his love and grace? Like the lovers in the song, God's passion for his creation is without bounds. God will not let us go off, lukewarm and away from him. God's warmth is revealed in the letter and the focus, and the desire of God is to draw all to himself. God wants us to be drawn into a deep relationship of trust. God seeks our invitation.

The image is of someone opening the door of their home and welcoming God in to share a meal. 'I will come into you and eat with you, and you with me'. With the same bold imagery of partnership and togetherness, John provides us with the picture of God moving over on the throne to make room for us. God comes to us; we go to God. This image of sharing resonates in the Song of Solomon. Historically, the church has handled the raunchy stuff in this book by reading it as an allegory of God's love for God's people. We can read it in this way, without denying that its primary focus is on sexual love and devotion. We can embrace the potential literal meaning of the poem without embarrassment or awkwardness.

At the same time, whilst reading the Song of Solomon as a theological metaphor for God's love, something interesting happens. In a lot of the Bible, there is a difference in the

relationship between God and humankind. Reading the Song as an allegory provides the view that the relationship is a partnership. There is a similarity here to the imagery in the Revelation of God making room on his throne for us, as he desires us to be with him. We may resist this strong language and run to a cool indifference behind a wall of, I can do this myself, without the help of God. This can equate to a sense of fear. However, there is no need to fear, as in God we have all that we need. Completeness, belonging, security and homecoming.

The image of Jesus in Revelation standing at the door and knocking picks up a similar message in the song, where the lover knocks on the door. In both cases, the one who hears the knock is free to open the door or not. There is no force. We can choose to lock the door and sit in cool indifference. We can also choose to throw it wide open and welcome God in with open arms and step into his eternal love.

**Mthr Jennifer Brady**