

Seven Psalms #2: “Love Songs and Love Psalms”
July 20, 2025

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
Romans 8:35-39

Earlier this month, Pascual Pedro, a 20-year-old construction worker and West Liberty High School graduate, was deported to Guatemala, the country he fled as a teenager. He was deported just days after ICE officials detained him when he met with immigration officials at their Cedar Rapids office July 1 for a routine check-in appointment.

On June 30, Muscatine resident Noel Lopez was detained and remains in Washington County nearly three weeks later. Lopez is 24 years old and has lived here without incident since he was two.

Two very young children and U.S. citizens (ages 11 months and 4 years old) remain in unknown care and location after their single father and sole provider was detained during an immigration enforcement action in West Branch on the morning of July 11.

Yet another immigration detention took place during a mandatory ICE check-in in Cedar Rapids on July 15.

These are not violent criminals. These are not the “worst of the worst.”

Our friends at the Iowa City Catholic Worker House tell us that “What we’re seeing now is just the beginning.” They suggest that what happened in Los Angeles was just the pilot project and that militarized immigration raids will slowly start to spread across the country.”

Just yesterday, Nicolas Kristof wrote: “Even for Americans who welcomed more deportations, there’s something chilling about the militarization of the crackdown and the echoes of police state practices: plainclothes officers wearing masks, refusing to give their names, grabbing people off the streets and hustling them into unmarked vehicles.”

What does any of this have to do with the Psalms that I’m preaching from this summer?

Just this: love—or as the old song suggests, “The *Power* of Love.”

Start reading through the Book of Psalms. It won’t take long before it becomes obvious that this is a collection of love songs.

Psalms 5 asks for God’s protection for those who love God. And from there, “love” shows up over 120 times in those 150 Psalms. In various ways the various psalmists speak of their love for God, condemn those who love false gods, and affirm God’s love for human beings and, indeed, God’s love for all creation. Near the end of this collection of songs, Psalm 136 seems to drive home the point, using the refrain: “God’s steadfast love endures forever” as the second half of each of the 26 verses in the psalm.

With an abundance of love psalms to choose from, this morning, we read together a short section of Psalm 119, which, with 176 verses, is the longest Psalm in the Bible. It is an acrostic poem. This

psalm has 22 stanzas corresponding to the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. In each stanza the eight verses begin with the same Hebrew letter. This long psalm is a meditation on God's *Torah* and commandments.

There in the final verse of this stanza are those words echoed in Psalm 136: "The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love."

Walter Brueggeman, the Old Testament scholar who died last month, suggested that *steadfast love* is like the love of a mother for her child, "the kind of love that stands with another no matter what is happening."

Here's what surprised me as I read the Psalm—this abiding, steadfast love is not something rare. The psalmist affirms: the earth is *full* of God's steadfast love. If we look, we might discover this love in the most unlikely places.

While events in the world or in our own lives might lead us to think otherwise, this steadfast love can be found in abundance on this earth. Look!—a love that stands with another no matter what is happening.

Paul's letter to the Romans helps us look so that we might see.

Writing to the early Christian congregation in Rome, Paul is clear that each of us is caught up doing the very things we don't want to do—and not doing the good we desire. That is, Paul identifies each of us and all of us as, well, sinners—those cut off from God, our neighbor, and the best in ourselves—who make choices and take actions that hurt others and ourselves. Certainly, there is ample evidence for this in the world and in our lives.

And yet, we are loved by God and can still choose to love one another. Paul reminds us of times when we have sighed and groaned with bitterness, when God seemed nowhere to be found—*or simply absent*. In just such times, Paul says, we are reminded of the steadfast love of God that fills the earth. This love affirms our struggle, calls forth our resilience, and helps us to move through the darkness.

Paul writes about "persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger and sword"—all very real threats to our own well-being and the well-being of others. I'm sure you can think of other threats—this list, like all of the lists Paul writes, is not meant to be complete.

But these threats do not mean defeat. John Calvin put it this way: "Though clouds obscure the clear view of the sun, they do not entirely deprive us of its light. So, in our adversity, the rays of God's grace shine through darkness so that we need not give in to despair."

We will always struggle with evil. We will always be tempted to give in and give up—for that is a part of living.

But, as Paul reminds us, we are not alone in our struggles. We are not alone even in our despair. None of this separates us from God's steadfast love. Even in adversity, even in failure, we can still attempt great things, we can still pursue what is right in all that we do.

We are not alone.

God is with us.

And we can show the kind of love that stands with another no matter what is happening.”

The Psalmist puts it this way: “I am a companion of all who fear you, O God,/of those who keep your precepts.”

Paul Simon sings: “Love is like a braid some say/and I, I don’t disbelieve it.”

Steadfast love is a strong cord binding us together with one another, binding us together with God.

So, the author of Ecclesiastes affirms what many know: “Two are better than one...if they fall, one will lift up the other...And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one.” And more than this—“A threefold cord is not quickly broken.” In the strange mathematics of love, one plus one equals three—a strong braid of love.

The author of Ecclesiastes is not a naïve optimist, as you know. Perhaps you heard in those words the suggestion that with enough pressure, even a threefold cord will snap. The pressure on human decency, the pressure on the rule of law, is great in these days.

Even so, the word of Ecclesiastes point to the strength and hope that is found in our connections with one another as we seek to show the steadfast love that we have known.

This sense of connection is a religious perspective.

The word “religion,” you will remember, comes from a Latin word that means “to bind together again.” Religion binds us not only to those with whom we agree, not only to those with whom we share common beliefs. It creates powerful bonds that hold us together with all people as God’s creatures.

The simple religious practices by which we express our faith—worship, prayer, generosity, hospitality, service—are ways that we reconnect with each other and with our neighbors. As we live out our faith, we rediscover the common bonds of our humanity.

A religious sense of the steadfast love of God can help make us just and peaceful in a time of uncertainty. It can help make us open and humane in a time of fear. It can help us establish communities of equality and respect in a time of change.

The vision that faith gives us is not of some heavenly afterlife.

In faith we look toward and pray for the coming of God’s realm, in which the will of God will be done, as we pray together each week, on earth as it is in heaven. Depending on how you understand those words, this world will be so transformed by the work of God or by the followers of Christ that chaos and death will be no more. Either way, that vision carries the sense that *this* present world and what we do *in it* and *to it* matters.

The Psalm we read this morning, then, is indeed a *religious* psalm. It sings of a love that binds us together: “I am a companion of all who fear you”—that is those who have a deep reverence and awe before God—“I am a companion of all who fear you,/of those who keep your precepts.”

This is the power of love.

So the Iowa City Catholic Worker House encouraged their friends this past week: “But here’s the truth: people power is how we win. Over the past three weeks, hundreds of workers, clergy, and everyday Iowans of all faiths and no faith have stood up, spoken out, and fought back. We are the primary change agents in society when we organize together.”

Our nation, like all nations, needs secure borders. Our broken immigration system is in desperate need of repair. But it will not be fixed by the wanton cruelty that is apparent across our nation and here in our own state, a cruelty that threatens to break the cords of compassion that people of goodwill have braided together over time.

Love is a cord that connects us with others.

It is a cord that is not easily broken.

And I, I don’t disbelieve it.