

## Do We Lean Into Companionship Love?

Friends (long-time and new), let us wonder together both in worship on this sixth Sunday of Easter and Mother's Day... and the occasion of the dedication of a Peace Pole in our front yard: Do we lean into companionship Love? Let us pray.

God of resurrection power, you are the steadfast companionship presence of Love in our lives. By that Holy Spirit, open us today to recognize new ways we can follow in the way of your risen Christ. In each of our waking moments, grant us serenity to accept the things that are not within our power to change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Toward the close of our reading inspired by Psalm 66, we hear a shout of joyful praise: "*Blessed be the holy Name of the Beloved, Loving Companion Presence, who has embraced me, and renewed my life.*" It functions as a summarizing exclamation for the six movements that precede it in this song of thanksgiving. From this summarizing exclamation (praising God as "Loving Companion Presence"), I drew the question 'do we lean into companionship love?' A companion is one who accompanies another, maintaining a close connection with the other.

I invite us to call to mind today some of the faithful companions of our lives. **Who has accompanied you, maintaining a close connection – be it for a chapter or for the long haul?** It could be one of the women in your family (a mother, grandmother, aunt, sister, daughter) or it could be someone you consider chosen family. How has that person's actions or words signaled to you that they cared deeply about your journey?

As is true with many poems and songs, the lyrical poetry of the Psalms transcends the limits of time and space with an ability to speak into circumstances as remote as one of our lives in the St. Croix Valley in 2023.

The 150 Psalms found in the current standard biblical canon take various shapes. One common shape is the category of lament. Psalms of lament are those in which the author calls out to God in a voice of sorrow or regret.

Another common shape among the Psalms is that of thanksgiving. In thanksgiving, we express gratitude in celebration of God's goodness. Psalm 66 is a psalm of thanksgiving. Let's journey with the Psalmist this morning, open to discovering how their experience of God (that is, companioning Love) might lead us to recognize companioning Love at work in our own lives. **In wondering if we lean into companioning Love, let's ask ourselves both whether or not we are receiving it and whether or not we are offering it with others.**

Let's listen closely for messages and lessons that each of the six movements of the Psalm can offer us. We heard,

*"Sing a joyful song to the Beloved, all the Earth, and praise Love's name; Sing in glorious exultation!*

*We say to You, "How magnificent are your ways:*

*So great is your power that fear and doubt vanish before You;*

*You are our Teacher for all ages:*

*We, who choose to listen and learn, sing songs of gratitude and joy."*

What did you hear? I heard a reminder that Love is the strongest and wisest energy in our lives. Fear and doubt are powerful, but Love is more powerful. Love is always ready to teach us its ways. **Will you lean into companioning Love as power and teacher, listening and learning, humbly receptive to how those around you embody love in powerful, wise ways?**

We heard,

*“Come and see what the Beloved has done; wondrous are the deeds of Love.*

*Remember when the sea turned to dry land?*

*There, we did rejoice in the One, who rules by the mighty Spirit of Love forever,*

*Whose eyes keep watch on the nations –*

*let not those who strive for power exalt themselves!”*

What did you hear? I heard a reminder that the “mighty Spirit of Love” has been with us. The signs of Love’s companioning presence have sometimes been obvious in those seeming miraculous moments of a near miss or a treatment taking hold – a sea turned to dry land for safe passage. **Will you lean into companioning Love as reminder that release and relief will come?**

We heard,

*“Bless the Beloved, Heart of our hearts, let the sound of our praises be heard.*

*You keep us attuned to life*

*And guide our feet on solid ground.”*

What did you hear? I heard that companioning Love is what keeps us closely “attuned to life” – available to receive and offer love in ways that have impact right now and here. **Will you lean into companioning Love to keep you attuned to all those who are living around you and need to be connected to Love through you?**

We heard,  
*“For You, O Love, have tested us;  
You have tried us as silver is tried.  
You have allowed us to fall into the net;  
You have watched us reap all that we have sown;  
we went through fire and through water,  
Yet You have brought us through our pain  
And into your dwelling place.”*

What did you hear? I heard a reminder that life is hard, full of challenges and pain. I also heard that companioning Love is what brings us through our pain and into deeper places of ultimate belonging in the heart of Love. **Will you lean into companioning Love, trusting that you are never alone and that you are especially held in the heart of God’s love when you are experiencing pain?**

We heard,  
*“I enter your house with gifts;  
I commend my soul into your keeping;  
all that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble and pain, I offer up to You;  
I abandon myself into your hands.”*

What did you hear? I heard someone inspired, confident in the knowledge of their own giftedness – ready to embody love in the community in just the way God created them to do. **Will you lean into companioning Love as a reminder that you bring gifts wherever you go?**

And we heard,  
*“Come and hear, all you who reverence the Most High,  
and I shall tell what the Beloved has done for me.  
I cried aloud to the Silent Watcher of my life;  
from my tongue came forth words of praise.  
Had I cherished greed and power,  
I would have separated myself from Love;  
the voice of my prayer was heard.”*

What did you hear? I heard honest, raw, humble presence. I heard that we are connected to companioning Love when we watch and listen for that “Silent Watcher of our lives” – when we don’t choose to hide and separate ourselves from that love. **Will you lean into companioning Love, trusting that your truest self is what is needed for embodying that love?**

Let’s hear one more time (as a blessing) the closing words of our reading for this morning. You may wish to close your eyes if you are comfortable receiving the blessing in that way.

*“Blessed be the holy Name of the Beloved,  
Loving Companion Presence,  
who has embraced me, and renewed my life.”*

Friends, let us go forth into these coming hours and days, embodying that companioning presence of Love that embraces all others – that is part of renewing the life surrounding us – because Love is counting on us. Amen.

Rev. Clare Gromoll  
People’s Congregational Church (Bayport, MN)  
May 14, 2023 (6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Mother’s Day, Peace Pole dedication day)  
Psalm 66