

## Wednesday Reflection: Rose of Sharon



Gazing into the garden, there is dampness in the air and a chilled, fresh breeze moves the trees and buddleia. The buddleia's vibrant purple heads are slowly fading – though bumble bees and red admirals still visit - and in the birch tree behind a flock of long-tailed tits dart from branch to branch, almost too fast for the eye to focus. The far corner of the garden, shaded and unsown, is bordered by a shrub, the Rose of Sharon. *Hypericum Calycinum* or 'Aaron's Beard', the Rose of Sharon with its medium green leaves and striking yellow flowers bring peace and calm. Beauty does yield mellowness and, for those prepared to pause, letting shape and colour seep into the soul, it conveys gently a sense of the sublime.

The Rose of Sharon brings to mind the erotic poetry in the Song of Songs. With its lush imagery drawing on nature's beauty, the poem is a speech of two lovers, of a relationship marked by presence and absence, and an unquenchable desire by the woman for the couple to run away together. The woman sings:

I am a rose of Sharon,  
A lily of the valleys.

The man replies:

Like a lily among thorns,  
So is my darling among the maidens.

Lying between Mount Tabor and Lake Tiberius, Sharon was a fertile plain; the very name suggested abundance and fruitfulness. The rose, 'flower of the field', is variously translated as lily, daisy or crocus. For some, it was the rock rose of Mount Carmel with a glow reminiscent of Scottish heather.

In the Jewish tradition, this intense love affair is used to describe the encounter of Moses with God at Mount Sinai or Moses' mystical union with the Sacred in the Tent of Meeting. In the Christian tradition, in Ide Guirey's hymn, Jesus is the rose:



Jesus, Rose of Sharon, bloom within my heart;  
Beauties of Thy truth and holiness impart,  
That where'er I go my life may shed abroad  
Fragrance of the knowledge of the love of God.

*Jesus, Rose of Sharon,  
Bloom in radiance and in love within my heart.*

The hymn captures a little of the intensity and sensuality of Song of Songs. I often think that 'lover' is a better noun to describe God than 'king', 'lord', 'saviour' or even 'father'. There is a healthy, invigorating spiritual tradition which conveys powerfully God as lover. In hushed tones, the thirteenth century mystic, Mechtild of Magdeburg (pronounced MECH-tild of MAG-de-berg) wrote:

Lord, you are my lover,  
My longing,  
My flowing stream,  
My sun,  
And I am your reflection.

The English Anchorite, Julian of Norwich, Dame Julian, also used sensual imagery. From her sparsely furnished, tiny cell, Julian wrote:

I saw that God is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help.  
God is our clothing, who wraps and enfolds us for love, embraces us and shelters us, surrounds us for love, which is so tender that God may never desert us.

Teresa of Avila was another such writer but so too was the priest and poet, the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, John Donne. Donne concluded his Holy Sonnet to the Three-Person'd God with these captivating lines in which he appealed to God, implored God:

Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

There, in the corner of the garden, a shrub that could so easily be overlooked is, in fact, a silent, beautiful symbol of love's source: Immortal Love; intense and impassioned.