**A Hidden Dove**

**By Rev. Sheryl Stewart**

Song of Solomon 2: 8-14 James 1:17-2:7 Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 20-23

Psalm 45: 10-17

**Summary: God sees our inmost spirit, trapped like doves hidden in stony need and sin. Jesus sets us free. Fly to God, perfected in love.**

 I’m not alone among women in loving a good romance, and I must confess it isn’t always *Harlequin Love Inspired*. Sometimes, I pick up Nora Roberts for a nice, spicy tale including Solomonic erotic moments. It’s a great comfort to me that the wisest man in history was also one of the most passionate. Although we usually read the new King James version, I especially like the Good News version Danny and I read today. “You are like a dove that hides in the crevice of a rock.”

 That echoes with great truth for me, personally. The challenge I presented in my childhood was my hiddenness. Most people, especially adults, only saw the rock and missed the dove. The man I love, and to whom I have been a wife for over 27 years, saw the dove. Even he might have missed her had not Jesus seen me first and opened a crevice.

 Outward appearances trip up most people. This tripped up the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They weren’t villains, they just focused on what they saw without letting God’s Word open eyes in their hearts. To see a hidden dove and free that captive spirit, you must start to see as God sees and let the truth fly free.

 There was, and is, much to admire about the Pharisees. They investigated God’s law and said, “I want to live like that.” Yet, like someone who looks in a mirror and forgets the image he or she sees, they forgot that God’s law did not reflect themselves, but God. They were created in God’s image, but they forgot that and ended up labeling people by rules that kept them captive instead of helping them fly to God.

 Remember the man who was so proud of his honesty in comparison with a despised tax collector? He ended up dishonest to God’s love while that very sinner was redeemed by the God whom he was so sure would condemn. This story urges us to look as God does, not on superficial outward appearances, but into the heart.

 When we look in the mirror, we need to start to see God’s reflection, who made us in His Image. Then, we need to remember that image, so others can see the same reflection in our lives. That chips away stony walls of sin and lets our true soul fly free. What goes into us is not inflexible law; rather, God puts heaven in us. We don’t need to earn our way to heaven by being good; instead, we start being good when heaven gets into us and starts seeping through the crevices.

 Old Noah was lost in a world of water, adrift in a seemingly endless sea of God’s wrath. He set free birds to bring him a sign of hope. He tried ravens first, but the carrion birds were too busy feasting on the results of sin to return. The doves returned with an olive branch, the sign of hope, of life, and peace.

 So, fly away from this ship of a church, tossed about on the waves of history and adrift in the storms of human assumptions. Don’t stay away to feast on your own appetites, but return and bring something, someone, with you when you do. We are here because our lover calls to us and it is his reflection which makes us who we truly are, and which sets us free forever.