

*Stern as death is love.*

## **A reading from the Book of Songs**

Hark! my lover—here he comes  
springing across the mountains,  
leaping across the hills.

My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag.  
Here he stands behind our wall,  
gazing through the windows,  
peering through the lattices.

My lover speaks; he says to me,  
“Arise, my beloved, my dove,  
my beautiful one, and come!  
“O my dove in the clefts of the rock,  
in the secret recesses of the cliff,  
Let me see you,  
let me hear your voice,  
for your voice is sweet,  
and you are lovely.”

My lover belongs to me and I to him.  
He says to me:  
“Set me as a seal on your heart,  
as a seal on your arm;  
For stern as death is love,  
relentless as the nether world is devotion;  
its flames are a blazing fire.  
Deep waters cannot quench love,  
nor floods sweep it away.”

The word of the Lord.