

Many waters cannot quench love

By [Beth Merrill Neel](#)

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Recently I asked my Facebook world what they were hankering to read a post about; the answers were few. But two friends both said they wanted to read something about love. One of them, a former college professor of mine and a drama queen in the absolute best sense of the term, [said this](#), "The mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death." I don't think my former professor is a religious sort of person, but her suggestion immediately took me to the Song of Songs:

*Set me as a seal upon your heart,  
as a seal upon your arm;  
for love is strong as death,  
passion fierce as the grave.  
Its flashes are flashes of fire,  
a raging flame.  
Many waters cannot quench love,  
neither can floods drown it.*

Death has been around more than usual of late, and I find little mysterious about the deaths nearest me. A member of my extended family died after a long illness, and there may have been some small mercy that he died before the disease took a more humiliating and painful toll. A young child in our congregation's circle had a brain tumor removed and the family faces a very different future than the one they imagined for her; their original dreams have died. Little disappointments add up to small deaths. And all this in the midst of Eastertide.

Death has not felt mysterious lately, but I know that it does feel that way sometimes. To be with someone in his last hours; to sit with a family as tears pour out when their 102-year-old aunt steps through the veil, tears of gratitude and relief; to walk a cemetery like a tourist, an unintentional voyeur of another's grief: there is mystery in death. It's not the mystery of why lungs stop inflating and deflating or why a heart stops beating. It's the mystery of the silence after, the vacancy of a life.

It's the void that some of us fill with hope that there is more. It's the moment after the conductor picks up the baton, before the music begins.

Love usually feels mysterious. On any given day I would be hard-pressed to say why I love my spouse and child. I could tell you what I love about them, but if you asked my why I love them, I'd likely stammer out, "Because I do." It's a privilege to love others in the cloud of mystery—some bosom friends, a parent or two. Some loves defy explanation. I will not name their names in order to protect the innocent, but I have two relatives, married to each other, and for the life of me and everyone else in the family, we cannot figure out what ever got them together, but 50 years later, there they are, tending to each other and bickering and getting creaky together.

Maybe love is more of a mystery because unlike death, we cannot always point to its work. We see the still, yellowing body and we know that death has come; mystery solved. But we see a garden, or a child, or we stand in a field in the middle of nowhere and look up at the shimmery night sky, and wonder if love made those things come to be. We watch the protests, and volunteers going through the rubble, and watch the watchers of the Supreme Court, and wonder if love is the force that weaves them together.

Would I say love is stronger than death? I would. I believe I have evidence to support the claim. But I would rather join Oscar Wilde in saying that the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death. It is in the mystery where we find ourselves without answers or solutions or our usual bag of tricks. It is in the mystery where we have only ourselves, and those few friends who will stay with us in the uncertainty, and for some of us, the Divine.

It is the mystery of love where I find my greatest hope, because if I cannot explain it, then it must be true.

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