

“THE GOD OF ALL BEAUTY.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

September 6, 2015, 10:30AM

Text for the Sermon: Psalm 27:4; 96:6; Philippians 4:8-9

Introduction.

What is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen? What was so beautiful, it took your breath away or fixed your gaze and mesmerized you? What is beautiful beyond words or description?

Do you enjoy and find delight in beautiful things? Do you love beauty?

Atheists say that the existence of suffering and evil is evidence there is no God. I reply beauty is evidence for the existence of God. Suffering and evil are our own doing. Beauty has no practical reason to exist except to reveal to us the nature and glory of our creator.

The beauty of God.

Let me state the premise we are considering this morning. God is the most beautiful being in the universe. All other beauty is defined by God and derived from God.

What makes God most “beautiful” is His character, His attributes – His goodness, love, purity, righteousness, perfection, compassion, grace, etc., and the actions that flow from those attributes.

When God reveals Himself, one of the things we see is the glory of each of His attributes reflected in a myriad of ways all through creation and through redemptive history. Beauty is God’s character on display.

Is beauty just in the eye of the beholder? I asked that question of an art teacher one time and he said yes. I just left it at that, I had my answer of what his underlying understanding of beauty was. What is that saying?

It says beauty is just subjective, it’s a matter of personal preference and taste, that I am the measure and standard for what is beautiful. It’s saying that there is no objective standard for beauty. It’s saying that God is not the measure, God is not the objective standard.

The God and creator of all beauty is the source of all beauty. God is beautiful and the standard of all beauty. What reflects God and glorifies God and is approved by God is good and beautiful.

Our souls were created to enjoy beauty and to never get our fill of it. Since God is the sum of all that is desirable, our highest and best desire is to desire God above all things. In heaven eternity will be an infinite filling up of our souls with consummate beauty.

Psalm 27:4 One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to gaze upon *the beauty of the Lord* and to inquire in his temple.

Psalm 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

Psalm 42:1-2 As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

Johnathan Edwards in his Personal Narrative writes how as he first started out getting to know God he was repulsed by God's sovereignty and providence, by God's judgment and holiness.

When he first read that God has mercy on whomever he wills and he hardens whomever he wills (Romans 9:18) God's absolute sovereignty and justice frightened him.

But as he grew in his knowledge and love for God he began to see the sweetness of all God's attributes, the sweetness of His awesome power and authority, of His majesty and splendor. He came to see how excellent and perfect and pure a Being God really is and began to delight in the Godness of God, and that all His attributes were exceedingly pleasant and bright and sweet and good. He then loved the beauty of God's absolute sovereignty and the glory of God being God. He came to say, "How excellent is God and how happy we should be that we might enjoy God."

God is the most beautiful being and to be desired above all things.

The Beauty in this world.

If beauty is objectively defined by God, then any reflection of beauty in our world is a dim reflection of the beauty of God. Only what is pleasing to God and approved of by God is truly beautiful, only what points to God and is cause for worship and admiration of God.

God created the world to put His beauty on display for His glory and our blessing and benefit.

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

There is a subjective side to beauty, we all experience God's objective beauty differently, but we say that without throwing out that there is such a thing as beauty and an objective standard for it.

Beauty is that which when seen or experienced pleases, delights, satisfies, gives joy or pleasure. What do we find most pleasing, most delightful, most beautiful? What gives us the greatest joy?

That crashing of waves on the seashore.

The sun streaming through the trees.

The sun setting on Mt. Baker.

The cascading waters of Nooksack Falls.

The rain falling from a thunderstorm.

Billowing clouds or the aurora borealis.

Singing birds, the graceful running of a deer.

The laughter of children

The courage and heroism of a person's faith or fight against cancer.

The incredible variegated colors and shapes of dahlias.

Fresh corn on the cob, raspberry jelly on toast.

The beauty of a Bach concerto, Vivaldi's Four Seasons, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D minor (the Ode to Joy symphony).

Where do you see the intensity of beauty in our world?

Do you see beauty and delight in ordinary things? If you can see and appreciate beauty in the ordinary then your life will be surrounded with beauty and you will be blessed. There is a glory and joy in the ordinary things, receive them as a gift of God. Especially blessed are those who see beauty where no one else sees it.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart.

To talk about beauty, we have to talk about *what is ugly*. We will understand and appreciate beauty more by this contrast. Heaven will be the more glorious because of what we have experienced on earth.

The ugliest thing in all creation was the fall, the destroying of God's creation with sin and evil.

Isaiah 59:2 Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you.

“This is the insanity of sin. We have forsaken that which is most satisfying only to lay hold of that which can never satisfy. “My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken

me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13). We have refused what is free and what is fully satisfying only to spend our money on that which cannot fill us (Is. 55:1-2).”

(<http://www.credomag.com/2014/02/05/gazing-on-his-beauty-fred-zaspel/>)

What is ugly in the world is whatever is contrary to God, against His perfect and pure will. Ugly is generally what we find offensive, displeasing, unpleasant, revolting.

A culture that abandons God or rejects God will not be able to distinguish between beauty and ugliness. It will increasingly become darker, more attracted to evil and sin, to what glorifies man or glorifies evil (ie The Burning Man Festival’s glorification of man and rebellion against God).

All the fine arts are being affected by man’s rejection of God and His beauty. The opponents of God cannot tolerate or endure the overwhelming purity of the beauty of God and the beauty of His holiness.

They rebel with music without harmony, music with dark themes like death, murder, suicide, foul language. They rebel with poetry that is nonsense or narcissistic.

They rebel with abstract art that reflects nothing pure or holy or good or soul inspiring, nothing that inspires worship of the creator. If someone throws a bucket of paint against a wall does it reflect form and creativity and beauty or chaos and rebellion?

Take God out of the picture and the picture will turn ugly.

Abortion is ugly, you all agree. Why? Because it is rebellion against the beauty of life and beauty of God’s image in babies.

Sexual perversion and all sex outside of marriage is ugly because it is rebellion against the holiness of the marriage bed and of the purpose of marriage to reflect the relationship of Jesus with His Bride, the church. It’s a rebellion against the fruitfulness of marriage.

Consider how pornography objectifies women and rebels against her being made in the image of God and that she doesn’t exist for every man to look at on the internet. Porn uses women for purposes never intended by God. Satan tries to pass it off as beautiful, but ugly is whatever doesn’t reflect God and God’s purposes.

We are more comfortable calling such things sinful, we flinch to call it ugly. We must learn not to call beautiful what is ugly, not to call good what is evil, not to say God approves when He doesn’t.

Implications and Applications.

Be aware of what do we look at, what do we watch? Who does it glorify? What does it appeal to in us? Fill your home with good music and things that cultivate an interest in beauty.

How do we encourage our children to notice what is good and beautiful? We should constantly admire the beauty of God's creation. We have watched it come out in sons who love to be in creation and sons who enjoy photography.

Our children are by nature destructive, breaking things, tearing things apart. Talk to them about why God made our hands, to build, create, make beautiful. God creates and He has made us in His image to create.

Women in general and wives and mothers in particular have a bent for making things beautiful, for creating beautiful spaces and making our homes beautiful. They bring beauty into our lives. And we men come along and create a tension, we suppress our wives love of beauty. She wants to do more creative things, but to men life is utilitarian, practical, efficient.

Phama takes joy in creating a meal and I say just put the pan on the table with two spoons. The goal is to get the food from the table to our mouths, right. So how do tablecloths and candles and nice china help that process? She wants to go to Michaels or Hobby Lobby and I say it just cost money.

Beauty is seldom necessary or functional or useful. Many of the most beautiful things in the world are the most useless like peacocks and sunsets. God has created a vast amount of "useless beauty." The universe is filled with glorious displays of brilliant splendor and much of it no one will ever see or visit. There are distant glorious galaxies no telescope will ever reach.

The endless variety of sights, sounds, tastes, colors, and textures in our world point to God's infinite glory and limitless creativity. God is not skimpy and minimalist, He pours it out. The heavens and earth declare the glory of God.

We men and maybe Dutch men in particular think we are being good stewards if we don't waste a penny on beauty, on anything unnecessary or impractical. Unless it's on the beauty of a new tractor or truck or exceptional blood lines for breeding cows.

What did Jesus do at the wedding in Cana? He turned water into wine and not just any wine but fine wine, a thing of excellence to be enjoyed.

As Christians made in the image of God and made to enjoy the beauty of God and the beauty of His creation we should cultivate a love of beauty and beautiful things. Stewardship also means leaving our world better than we found it, improving it. Don't have an adversarial relationship with beauty but give it a place of priority in our homes and lives and hearts.

Knowing God sets us free to enjoy beauty without being in bondage to it or seduced by it. Love God and goodness of God and the beauty of God.

Beauty of repentance.

I started out asking you, what is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen? Human beings, renewed by the transforming work of saving grace, are the supreme instance of the beauty of God displayed in creation.

One of the most beautiful things in the world is seen only among believers, and that is the beauty of repentance, the beauty of a heart poured out in humble, sincere confession of sin and turning away from it.

Pride is ugly and the opposite of pride is humility which is what makes repentance beautiful. Sinners become beautiful when they behold and reflect the beauty of Jesus Christ. What does Luke 15 say about heaven, that there is joy in heaven over one sinner repenting. There is joy in the beauty of humility expressed in repentance. The beauty of heaven is that it will be filled with repentant sinners.

God's beauty is His holiness, His purity, His righteousness, and His beauty is reflected in our world and in our hearts in those same characteristics.

Ask God to open the eyes of your heart (Ephesians 1:18) to see more of His beauty in our world and in His Church, in Jesus, in our salvation and sanctification, to see the beauty of God in holiness and godliness and repentance and forgiveness.

Ask God to change what you want, from your selfish and fleshly desires, to desiring God and desiring His beauty, His holiness. Ask God to make the prayer of the Psalmist your prayer:

Psalm 27:4 One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to gaze upon *the beauty of the Lord* and to inquire in his temple.

Prayer: Lord God, the source of all grandeur, on this day we come before your presence to behold your radiant glory and to see your everlasting beauty. The heavens shine with your transcendent glory; the earth radiates your magnificent beauty. In the Gospel you unveiled your greatest beauty to us, the grandeur of your grace and the lavish riches of your love. May we see your beauty all around us and in each other and especially in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord. In whose name we pray, Amen.