

*... May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing and of you, who are ROCK, REDEEMER, and COMFORTER of us all. Amen.*

It is often been said, Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Our scripture passage today suggests this saying to be a truth. But is it?

Did you look into a mirror today? Did you greet yourself... 'Hello Beautiful'? Did you 'savor' the beauty in yourself?

Check out two choir members, fitting themselves with new masks... and their reactions... VIDEO clip

One says It fits perfectly (my face must be perfect)... another says it's a challenge with hearing devices (its not easy with these needed devices)...

My guess is, most of us don't see beauty. If anything, when gazing at our reflection, we are most likely looking for the flaw, the wrinkle, the pimple, the imperfection or the change in texture of what we see.

Friends, the scripture today is a reminder that you... I... we are gazed upon by God, and God sees beauty in us, God desires us, God loves us as God's people and as God's church, a community of God's people focused on loving God and God's people. What I want us to consider today is savoring the beauty that God has for each of us as sacred, worthy of love, and cultivating an eye for savoring the beauty in others and all God's creation because God savors the beauty in each one.

Remember, the contemplative way of life is not simply adding on meditation or prayer practices to our beliefs about God. It is a journey which cultivates our connection and beliefs about God so we might go deeper in relationship with the Divine Beloved.

We've looked at growing deep roots, soaking in the warmth of God's love, focusing on resiliency in difficult times, and the beauty of WOW in the mystery of unknowing. Today we savor beauty in ourselves and those we meet.

Let's think about this style of writing. First, It is an ancient poetic form that is suggestive, full of imagery, yet elusive. Second, it invites application beyond the concrete human love to also a divine love between God and Israel or Christ and the church. It invites a figurative interpretation. Many Jewish and Christian scholars make this point of interpretation. John Wesley might suggest this entire book as a means to describe the perfect love of God.

Further, John Wesley, and Jesus, would suggest to us that love of God goes hand in hand with loving God's people. In fact, Wesley implores that "because we love thee (O God), let us love one another with a 'love stronger than death'".<sup>1</sup>

In this book, and in the text today, we can hear the mutuality, beauty, and respect that allows us to cultivate a deeper appreciation for who we see in the mirror, and in the world around us.

In this season of contention in politics, in race relations, in concern for equity & access, seeing the beauty in ourselves and others is vital. Cultivating seeing one another and ourselves as God sees us, asks us to place value and sacred worth in every being.

It's hard to make sense of the mystery of beauty, but that is what we are searching for in this worship series. In her book, *Beguiled by Beauty*<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Farley says, "The capacity for beauty requires that we *adore* the mystery of others and recognize it as sacred and deserving of protection." Song of Songs exemplifies this sentiment.

How do we adore the mystery of others?

How do we recognize the sacredness of others?

What judgements, biases, or thinking gets in the way of seeing the sacredness of others?

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<sup>1</sup> Strawn, Brent A. 'Song of Songs'. Wesley One Volume Commentary. Nashville: Abingdon Press, @2020. P 372.

<sup>2</sup> Farley, Wendy. *Beguiled by Beauty*. @2020.

Think about the images seen as Derrick read the scripture... Can we marvel at beauty in the ways we see all the ages depicted in the scripture video (lectio divina)? These images suggest a connection, a relationship, and an intimacy, not in terms sexuality or of "eros", but rather, as a yearning for the well-being of others.

This is our challenge in these days, friends. To see one another as sacred, as loved by God, just as we are to know we are loved by God.

May it be so. So be it. Amen.