

SALT CO

2/25/24

Putting Ourselves in the Path of Oncoming Beauty

*“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very...
beautiful”* Genesis 1:31

WELCOME TO THE SALT CO!

When we say “Seasoned Adults” we mean this in two ways:

SEASONED AS IN...

Chronologically-- we’ve lived a lot of seasons of life
BUT more importantly-

Spiritually--- by the grace of God, when we receive Christ into our
lives we become like THIS [gesture: one hand—two hands—joined
together]

...we become a new creation...transformed and *transforming* for
the rest of our lives.

JESUS CALLS US THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

So, we call this the SALT CO...

I want to introduce our theme by way of a story.

The last quarter of my last year of seminary I was in a knot. I had almost completed my M.Div. degree but hesitated to put out my resume. Did I really want to do this pastor thing? So, I signed myself up to meet with the “golden boy” of the School of Psychology. We met ten times and talked about all sorts of things for which I have no memory.

I do remember the last session vividly.

Brian said, *"Lay down on the couch"*. I said, *"Who are you? Sigmund Freud?"* He said, *"Just do it."* So I stretched out. He invited me to relax, to make myself entirely calm, to breathe deeply, slowly, to feel my body full of strength. After a while of this, he asked me a life altering question:

"Where are you when you feel like this?"

It came to me in an instant. I was in the mountains, on a trail, carrying a pack. I was walking through a deep green forest with vibrant blue sky and white puffy clouds overhead. I could hear rushing water tumbling down granite faces shining in the warm sun.

Brian said, *"OK, we're done."*

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"We're done. Go do it. In no later than four days."

"What? Four days?!"

"Go home and tell your wife I said you need to go do what you just described within four days, whatever it takes..."

I think he said something like, *"Make it real."*

After considerable conversation with Suzanne, and much scrounging for equipment, four days later I headed up into the High Sierra on a solo backpack trip.

Looking back, I see that this was the beginning of my almost annual plunges into overwhelming beauty for which I have no words.

I've tried to capture some of it in photos. Each one of these comes from a different backpack trip up on the John Muir Trail:

You look at these, and maybe you think, "Well that's really beautiful. But the photos all miss something. But you know how this goes. You have to be there! Right? You know what I mean. To get it you have to be IN it!

Today and for the next three SALT CO's we're going to explore a theme I've borrowed from Christian author and psychiatrist Dr. Curt Thompson who has been exploring what it's like for us to put ourselves in what he calls the "path of oncoming beauty". (Mention his book The Soul of Desire.)

He describes ways we find ourselves on that path, what happens in our own souls. Think of the path of oncoming beauty in David's psalm,

***"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack,
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside still waters,
He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake..."***

We encounter beauty.

We come around a bend and a breathtaking vista causes us to pull over. We really have no words. We just try to "take it in".

You stand on the beach at sunset. You feel the warm sand on your bare feet as you watch our nearest star, flaming huge orange, sinking silently into the endless ocean. You slip into a different kind of time.

Somehow, you feel comforted by your own smallness, The last thing you want to do in that moment is check your phone.

All you might be able to say is, *“Beautiful.”*

One man tells the story of encountering a daisy rising out of a crack in cement that awakened him to wonder. He tried to put this in words:

*“Colossal leagues of powers
Went to make one daisy.
And colossal choirs of angels
Could not give thanks for it.”* (G.K. Chesterton)

When the beautiful strikes it stops you. It takes away your breath. It claims you.

It sends you to tell others.

Curt Thompson suggests that when we find ourselves in the path of beauty, four things happen in order:

Wonder- “WOW!”
Welcome- “Come and see!”
Worship!- Creation calls us to worship

This is the witness of God’s word. Listen for example to Psalm 96

PSALM 96 in The Message

¹⁻² Sing God a brand-new song!
Earth and everyone in it, sing!
Sing to God—*worship* God!

²⁻³ Shout the news of his victory from sea to sea,
Take the news of his glory to the lost,
News of his wonders to one and all!
⁴⁻⁵ For God is great, and worth a thousand Hallelujahs.
His furious beauty puts the other gods to shame;
Pagan gods are mere tatters and rags.
⁵⁻⁶ God made the heavens—
Royal splendor radiates from him,
A powerful beauty sets him apart.
⁷ Bravo, God, Bravo!
Everyone join in the great shout: Encore!
In awe before the beauty, in awe before the might.
⁸⁻⁹ Bring gifts and celebrate,
Bow before the beauty of God,
Then to your knees—everyone worship!
¹⁰ Get out the message—God Rules!
He put the world on a firm foundation;
He treats everyone fair and square.
¹¹ Let's hear it from Sky,
With Earth joining in,
And a huge round of applause from Sea.
¹² Let Wilderness turn cartwheels,
Animals, come dance,
Put every tree of the forest in the choir—
¹³ An extravaganza before God as he comes,
As he comes to set everything right on earth,
Set everything right, treat everyone fair.

Theologians seem reticent to attempt a definition of what “beauty” is. Maybe that’s because when we encounter beauty we are getting a glimpse not only of creative genius, but of the Creator Himself.

We speak of the glory of the Lord.

“Glory” is another way to express the beauty of the Lord.

The two words in our Bibles that are used to translate as “beauty” or “beautiful” are TOB in Hebrew, and KALOS in Greek.

Interestingly, these two words (TOB and KALOS) are more commonly translated as “good”. But I find it fascinating that the linguists say it is difficult to tease apart what is good and at the same time “beautiful”. This makes sense. What is truly beautiful is always “good”. And we all would agree I think that what is truly good is beautiful.

Dallas Willard made an attempt at a description, of beauty when he put it, “*Beauty is good made visible*”. But on reflection, we don’t just see beauty, we also hear it (music, sound of wind, a child’s voice), touch it (our baby’s skin on our face, the feel of peeling a ripe orange), smell it (can fresh baked bread evoke beauty?), taste it (the Lord’s Supper). Maybe we do better to say beauty is “good made *manifest*”. To all our senses.

Perhaps our encounter with beauty is where and how we enter into what we find to be “good”, because goodness is not only an “ethical ideal” that we dispassionately reason, but rather something we are drawn to, that we find “attractive” so that we desire it more than anything and so pursue.

There is perhaps no better place to see how this is true than in the first page of our bibles. Genesis chapter 1.

Have a look at this video from the Bible Project. About 7 minutes.

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/genesis-1/>

The common translation of 1:31 goes, ***“God saw that everything he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”***

If God is like an Artist at His canvas- is “good” the best translation of v. 31 ? Would this not read more effectively as ***“God saw that everything he had made, and indeed, it was very beautiful”***? Notice that God “saw”, God did not “say”.

The first page of our Bibles invites us to imagine God seeing what He has made with joy. We are not being told as much as *shown* just the way art does not “explain” itself. We are *drawn in* as participants in what is happening in creation, we are finding out what kind of God this is, the God of the bible!

Maybe we can begin to feel God’s joy in creating.

1. Share your name and describe a place in creation where you experience or have experienced incredible beauty. Describe it in as much detail as you can.
2. Use the C.S. Lewis reflection below to help you describe what it was like for you to be in that beautiful place?
3. How does remembering this place and what it was like help you now?

“We want to be united with the beauty that we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.” (C.S. Lewis in The Weight of Glory, p. 42).

I said before there are four ways of finding ourselves in the path of oncoming beauty impacts us:

Wonder, Welcome, Worship, **and** the fourth way is...

WORK

We are drawn in by God’s good pleasure, but also “out” to see with new eyes, to take in with all our senses renewed the magnificence in which we live, move and have our being. We are literally *alive* in His good pleasure! We see ourselves as God sees us. Called to participate in the beauty He has made, and in His project to make all things new!

There is work for you and me.

We’re going to try and show how we can put ourselves in the path of oncoming beauty in four moves:

Today, in our encounters with God’s beauty in creation

Next time, how we are made to be creators of beauty (!)

Third time- how we see beauty in things set right. Example of seeing someone helping someone else, we find ourselves saying, “That’s beautiful!” **The ultimate example is the CROSS...and it’s no accident we’ve chosen to explore this theme during LENT. We’ll talk about this the week before Holy Week.**

Last time- After Easter, on how we are being made... beautiful!

“We emphasize the significance of putting ourselves in the path of on-coming beauty in as many different forms as possible in order to strengthen our anticipation of and capacity to engage beauty when it presents itself.” (Soul of Desire, p. 221).

Because...

-Beauty invites us back into joy

-If we are made in God’s image, and God sees us “beautiful” then we can believe it’s possible to see ourselves and each other this way!

-Beauty invites us back into our calling to be creators of beauty

I would submit-- that the fine art of Eldering includes getting good at putting ourselves, and then assisting others onto the path of oncoming beauty!

TAKE AWAY’S for today

1. Go outside, get out under the sky (“heaven”).

Jesus in Matthew 6 sends us out to consider the lilies of the field, the birds of the air. Elsewhere he has us looking at mustard seeds, reflecting on weather, seasons. In His prayer He guides us, “Our Father in heaven (of all skies)”, and for His joy, beauty, goodness, rightness to come “on earth as it is in heaven...”

Creation calls us to worship. Psalm 96, 104, 148.

2. Practice Sabbathing as regular, habitual time away, and “out” to imagine the new creation coming, what it will be like when all things will be made new, including us!

3. To quote Brian, "*Make it real.*" Or in the esteemed words of Captain Jean Luc Picard, "Make it so."

WALK THE TALK

1. Journey to the Cross: a place where we can be part of remembering the beauty/creating the beauty and inviting others onto the pathway to the terrible beauty of the CROSS