

SALT CO.
3/10/24

Putting Ourselves in the Path of Oncoming Beauty
Created to be Makers of Beauty

“The Lord God took the man [ADAM] and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” Genesis 2:15

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--- ...like when sodium and chlorine combined make SALT... 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—situated right alongside Route 60+ where we pull over-to share some stories of our journeys—to refresh, retool and REFUEL...

This Lenten Season we are exploring the theme:
Putting Ourselves in the Path of Oncoming Beauty

We began last time reflecting on the overwhelming beauty that surrounds us in creation.

We saw that in the Scriptures the word that gets translated as “beautiful” can also be translated as “good”. This is interesting. This suggests that, according to the witness of God’s word that what is good is “attractive”. We are drawn to good. Often when we see something that is good we will say, “That’s just beautiful”. And vice versa.

And here is where we are going this morning, are you ready for this (?), *you and I were made to be creators of beauty!* (I can hear the jokes, the self-talk, “the most beautiful thing I ever made was a pot of coffee...” “I’m a stick figure kind of person” (that’s me!). “I *flunked* art class!”

So let me show you something.

I made this (Adirondack Chair)... with help. A friend and I made ten of these many years ago. Five per household.

Now, let me ask you, what are your impressions as you look at this photo of this chair?

Here are some possibilities:

-You look at this with a critical eye, maybe you think, “*I wouldn’t have built it this way!*” Or, “What a drab color!”

-Maybe you’re thinking, “*Man, that must have been a lot of work! I’d just go out and buy one!*”

-OR, perhaps as you look at this Adirondack chair you flash on a scene, someplace *outside* somewhere, where you sat in a chair like this, and what it was like to rest and take in in that place, what you saw, felt. Maybe looking at this photo brings back a surprising sense of gratitude... that's *good*!

-When I say we built *ten* of them maybe you picture in your mind people sitting in a circle of chairs, laughing, telling and listening to stories, hanging out in glad to be togetherness.

All this from an Adirondack chair I built with the help of a friend.

Maybe then you would say this Adirondack chair is "beautiful". Not so much in how it looks, but in what it invites.

My point: that when we make (create) real "beauty" we open a way to what is *good*.

We all do this all kinds of ways.

How about cultivating a garden? There are blooms, the smells, the feel of fuzzy leaves, not to mention the tasty fruit!

Suzanne and I took a cooking class a couple of weeks ago. Our teacher used fresh herbs, vegetables, broth. That large pot of steaming soup was a thing of "beauty" inviting us to dip in a ladle and fill our bowls, and taste, yes, it was *very good*!

Our class gathered in our teacher's newly remodeled kitchen that opened up onto a welcoming living room. Someone designed (created) that huge island where we chopped carrots and celery. Some very talented folks constructed the framing. Others laid the pipes and installed the plugs in just the right places. That's beautiful too, because they made a place where people for years after will share life together.

What about creating a way for people at your business to work more collaboratively? Is that “beautiful”?

Or learning to play an instrument, a guitar, piano, flute, violin that draws people around?

I think about the stack of pancakes my grandson and I make together. They’re not just good. I say they’re “beautiful”!

Or just singing a lullaby to your grandchild as you watch her eyes grow heavy? Maybe she feels the sound of your voice as beautiful?

Christian Artist Makoto Fujimura writes in his book Art+Faith (see your Table Guide sheet),

“Whether we are plumbers, garbage collectors, taxi drivers, or CEO’s, we are called by the Great Artist to co-create. The Artist calls us little ‘a’ artists to co-create, to share in the ‘heavenly breaking in to the broken earth. In order to be called a Christian, we need to be marked with our capacity to make, and generatively create with, and through, the fruit of the Spirit.”

(Art+Faith p. 90-91)

Earlier in his book he writes,

“Before the Fall, we were all artists and poets.”

(Art+Faith, p. 64)

Bill Russell shared with me that *Navaho Indians didn't have a word in their language for "Artist" because they couldn't conceive of a human, made in the image of God, who was not creative.*

So we hear In Genesis:

“The Lord God took the man [ADAM means “humankind”] and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”

Genesis 2:15

“Till” means “to cultivate, Hebrew literally means to “serve” ... serving under the Creator’s mandate, answerable to Him for its care. Gardening, making order, a creative enterprise in which Adam has responsibility to “make”.

A little further on Genesis 2 we hear,

“...So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field...” Genesis 2:19-20)

-By asking Adam to name the animals, God really calls on him to exercise his ability to co-create in Eden... (Genesis 2:15).

We’ve been making and co-creating ever since the beginning.

We do this in humility. Because the Lord knows we have limits. We cannot create the way God does (ex nihilo). We use God-provided materials. Perhaps you’ve heard this one:

The scientist said to God, "We have decided we no longer need you, as we can create anything in the laboratory just as easy as you can create something" God answered, "OK let's see who can create a

human from dirt." The scientist reached down and gathered up some dirt...God said, "Not so fast. Get your own dirt!"

Jesus says in Matthew 5,

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your beautiful works [KALA ERGA= what draws people to what is 'good'] and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Using our faithful imagination, we continuously find ways to create beauty that draws others onto the path of oncoming beauty.

We are in the process of re-creating the **Journey to the Cross**. We worked as a collaborative team with Young Adults using props and printed images to depict the fourteen stations that marked the path Jesus took to the cross. Then we invited the community onto that path of oncoming beauty—on GOOD FRIDAY —culminating in the beauty of the cross--the GATEWAY to the glad-to-be-together-JOY set before Christ...and because of him now accessible to us--to be able to enter into our Father's presence through Christ's creative action to break through the barrier of our SIN once and FOR ALL.

I took this video of the last four stations...

<https://vimeo.com/919753212?share=copy>

I think this is beautiful. And we get to do it again in a few weeks!

Creating beauty is not easy. It takes work. I was talking the creative process with my friend and artist Doug Lemen. I asked him if he might be willing to talk with us about this. Here he is! Let's welcome up a good friend, Doug Lemen.

Welcome Doug! You served here at Calvary for many years directing our art projects as well as creating many pieces for us.

We have a few of your very many pieces up on screen.

1. Tell us about what inspired you to create this?
2. What external and internal obstacles did you encounter, (do you encounter on a regular basis)?
 - a. External- having a “making space”, gathering materials, developing skills, tools, time (!)
 - b. Internal, one person I spoke with this week described his having to overcome what he called the “Imposter Syndrome”= “Who do I think I am?” A form of our “shame narrative” that keeps us from creating. How do you get through this obstacle?
3. What have you found that helps you overcome these obstacles?
 - a. Honesty with caring others who see, soothe, make us feel safe and secure enough to risk creating. Creating something is ALWAYS RISKY!
4. What would you say to someone here this morning who is wondering if they really can create beauty? Or who is saying to themselves, “I can’t do this...”?

So maybe you are still counting yourself out to some degree or another. One common obstacle for the “non-professional artists in the room” often face are the very words ART and BEAUTY

Sometimes saying the same thing a slightly different way can help us think about something in a fresh way.

What if--(instead of “art”) we said: creative action

*What if—(instead of “beauty” we said: making something good **manifest** (seen, heard, felt, tasted like pancakes.)*

*Suzanne ran into an article recently about food: they suggested that food could be thought of as “**God’s love made delectable**”.*

Let’s talk about this.

TABLE TALK (30 minutes)

1. Share your name and some creative action you’ve taken recently. Talk about how something “good” was made manifest to the senses (seen, heard, felt, tasted, smelled).
2. What “inspired” this creative action?
3. What obstacles (external or internal) did you have to “overcome” to create this? How did you overcome these?
4. Invite others around the table to share what your creation evokes for them (memory, a place, people, events).

WRAP UP

You and I are on the path of oncoming beauty.

Here is the largest most expansive possible frame through which we can (must?) consider our creative work, our “making”:

“What you do in the Lord is not in vain. You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that’s about to roll over a cliff. You are not restoring a great painting that’s shortly going to be thrown on the fire. You are not planting roses in a garden that’s about to be dug up for a building site. You are- strange though it may seem, almost hard to believe as the resurrection itself- accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God’s new world.” (N.T. Wright in Surprised by Hope, p. 208.

“We are all artists of the Kingdom, and the world needs to see such extravagant beauty in us, or else we are not the Bride of Christ, which is the church.” (William Blake in Art+Faith, p. 92)

From Curt Thompson in *The Soul of Desire*, also in your notes:

“We were made then, as a function of being known, to create beautiful farms, friendships, software, public policy, sculpture, highways, soufflés, architecture, poetry, furniture, marriages—you get the picture—such that these icons of beauty and goodness circle back around to further enhance our experience of being known and loved.

This can be as “simple” as trying out a new recipe; pulling weeds in your garden; coloring with your child; watching a video instructing you how to begin to draw; beginning to read a critically acclaimed biography; planting flowers or herbs; writing in a journal about your reflections of the day.

These are examples of how we can actively engage our brain’s right hemisphere’s mode of attunement to the world, the mode that keeps us temporally engaged in the present moment. Moreover, these acts of creativity give us a sense of agency, of acting in this world that, for the moment in which we are creating, changes it by focusing our attention on beauty, and in this case, the beauty that begins to emerge when we create something, no matter how elementary it may seem.

Dr. Curt Thompson

This too is what we mean by practicing the fine “art” of eldering.

Take Away’s

1. We begin by waking up to beauty all around us, especially in creation. We awaken, become alert, and attune to beauty. Over time we become “good” at seeing beauty. This takes “work”.

2. Where do you see an opportunity to create something beautiful on the path of someone who needs to see beauty?
3. What do you need to get started?
 - a. Talk about a “Making Space” (mid westerners with a wood shop in the back yard where they make grandfather clocks, chairs and tables, fancy little boxes...) My friend had a garage full of woodworking tools where we built those Adirondack chairs.
4. Who can help you get started? How?

WALK THE TALK

1. Journey to the Cross sign up, our opportunity to invite people onto a “path” of oncoming beauty!