

FINDING BEAUTY

Week #3 of a 9-week series, "Finding Yourself"

May 17, 2023

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Okay; you ready? Now, if you don't like this talk ... oh, well! [Congregation laughs]

Okay, so I want to start by asking the question: Is darkness a thing? [Congregation mutters replies] Well, is it really a thing? Because some things look like things, but they're not really things at all! Like, what we know about darkness is: It's not really a thing! The thing is light. Darkness is defined by the absence of light. And it looks like it's a thing. You know, when we walk into a dark room -- like I did a couple of weeks ago and stubbed my toe -- it looks like a thing. Darkness acts like a thing. We believe it's a thing. But it's not really a thing; it's the absence of a thing!

And I think, as spiritual beings, we need to really hold what's a thing and what's not a thing. Because just because we see it doesn't mean it's a thing!

Now, let's take ugliness. Is ugliness a thing? I would suggest tonight that ugliness is like darkness -- that it's not really a thing. It's the absence of beauty.

And I want to talk about beauty tonight. And I want to talk about ugliness. Because I think there's a spectrum -- a line; an infinite line -- that has ugliness on one side and radical ugliness way off in the distance, and absolute gorgeous beauty at the other end. And I want to ask you: In this spectrum -- in this continuous, infinite line -- where do you live? Do you live with a lot of ugliness and a little bit of beauty? Do you live with a lot of beauty and a little bit of ugliness? Do you live in a world where there is no ugliness, and it's all beauty? Or are there days where you feel like there's way too much ugliness and not near enough beauty?

You know, I've been doing this series the last couple of weeks on "Finding." And I believe that, as a soul, one of our jobs is to find ourselves. It's actually to find all that God has placed within us. And that's no small thing! Because I believe, as a spiritual being, there's so much God in each one of us that it really is part of our life's journey to discover all that God is within us. And to find it!

And today, I want to talk to you about finding beauty. And I want you to find beauty, not only all around you, but I want you to find beauty within you. And for some of us, we've been told that that's not always easy. But I believe that it's fundamentally important that we find beauty; that we focus on beauty; that we look for beauty. For me, beauty is one of the most profound experiences of God. It is how we know God in Its purest way.

Aristotle said:

"Beauty is a gift from God."

Joseph Addison said:

"There is nothing that makes its way more directly into our soul more than beauty."

Confucius said:

"Everything is beautiful, but not everyone sees it."

D.H. Lawrence said:

"The soul actually needs beauty more than it needs bread."

And I believe that that's true! I believe that our soul needs beauty to remind us of God and to remind us of who we are. That if we spend too much time and too much energy focusing on the ugliness of life, we get distorted; we get depressed; we lose our way. Because it looks like -- when we focus too much on ugliness -- it looks like the world is a very ugly place.

You know, as a child -- as a little child -- I did not understand ugliness. It literally did not make sense to me! It didn't make sense to me why people lived in ugliness; it didn't make sense to me why people would speak in ugly ways or act in ugly ways. It just did not make sense to me. Because at some level, my little soul knew that it wasn't of God. That when we are acting or speaking or behaving in ugly ways, it is not purely goodness; it's not of God. And there was something so deep within me that just was repelled by it.

But there's something that happens as we get older. We tend to adjust to it. We tend to allow for it. We tend to make peace with it. We tend to think, "*Well, that's just the way life is.*" But it isn't! Like, how much ugliness do you tolerate in your life? How much ugliness do you accept as part of your life experience? And are you willing to embrace a greater level of beauty and to see the impact it has on your soul?

Anne Frank said this:

"Think of all the beauty still left around you ..."

Now, this is Anne Frank! This is when she is in the attic. This is where they're in hiding from Nazi persecution. And this is her statement:

"Think of all the beauty that's still around you and be happy."

Like, if she can do that! Like, what level of beauty does she find that we can call forth in our own lives?

Beauty heals us.

There's a Navajo blessing ceremony: "The Blessing Way." And the ceremony: It's about awakening to a natural order. It's about awakening to a new way of living; to life-affirming choices. And it's about healing. It's the feminine path of nurturing. And in this prayer, it invites the soul to come back to beauty as a healing! Like, as a healing of the soul. The soul needs beauty to fully heal. So let me read a section. And this is the last aspect of "The Blessing Way":

*In beauty I walk
With beauty before me I walk
With beauty behind me I walk
With beauty above me I walk
With beauty around me I walk
It has become beauty again*

*Today I will walk out; today everything negative will leave me
I will be as I was before; I will have a cool breeze over my body
I will have a light body; I will be happy forever; nothing will hinder me
I walk with beauty before me
I walk with beauty behind me
I walk with beauty below me
I walk with beauty above me
I walk with beauty around me
May my words will be beautiful*

*In beauty all day long I walk
Through the returning seasons, may I walk
On the trail marked with pollen, may I walk
With dew on my feet, may I walk
With beauty before me, may I walk
With beauty behind me, may I walk
With beauty below me, may I walk
With beauty above me, may I walk*

*In old age, wandering on a trail of beauty, lively, may I walk
In old age, wandering on a trail of beauty, living again, may I walk
May my words always be beautiful*

I want you to hear that! How, in this healing prayer, this idea of surrounding yourself in beauty is necessary for the soul to heal. That, when we are feeling disconnected or depressed or anxious or afraid, our soul needs beauty. Whether it's in music; whether it's in art; whether it's in nature; whether it's in the faces of our loved ones, we need beauty. We need to focus on beauty; we need to celebrate beauty; we need to see that beauty is our path.

So how do we access beauty in our life? And I've got six points that I want to share with you tonight.

The first one is to **STOP**. Our spiritual life deepens when we learn to stop for a moment and experience beauty. Beauty is all around us, but we have to stop and experience it. So last Saturday, we celebrated my grandson's -- my youngest grandson's -- second birthday. I'm telling you ... Like, this little guy is just adorable from top to bottom. Right? Top to bottom: adorable! So I'm sitting there and we're celebrating and, you know, we're having fun. And he says, "*Grandpa, can I come sit on your lap?*" It's like, "*Please!*" Right? [Congregation laughs] And he crawls up on to my lap, and it is like ... It is so special! But in those moments that are pure beauty, we have to be willing to stop and let ourselves have them! Like, it's hard always to see beauty when we're running at 90 miles an hour -- to notice the beauty that's all around us. That we actually have to learn to stop.

Two: I believe that we have to **SET AN INTENTION FOR BEAUTY**. Like, sometimes we set intentions for all kinds of things that don't feed our soul. And every morning when we get up, I believe that we can set an intention to be touched by beauty that day: "*May I see beauty today. May I experience what is beautiful all around me today.*" And when we set an intention for beauty, I believe that, at some level, we are more in tune to it. We notice it; we see it; we celebrate it; we give thanks for us. "*May I see beauty for today. May I set an intention.*"

Three: **BEAUTY HEALS**. It does! It restores us. It renews us. It allows the greater good to manifest in our lives.

Four: **GIVE THANKS FOR BEAUTY**.

Five: **FILL YOUR LIFE WITH ALL THE THINGS THAT YOU FIND BEAUTIFUL**. Beautiful music; beautiful art; flowers; nature; people. Surround yourself in beauty.

Six: **SEEK OUT NEW EXPERIENCES** that we may know beauty in greater and greater and greater ways. For the most powerful way to find beauty is within ourselves.

Selma Hayek said this:

"People often say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I say that the most liberating thing about beauty is realizing that you are the beholder! This empowers us to find beauty in places where others have dared not look, including inside of ourselves."

Like, so many of us believe at, at some level, that we're bad; or that we're broken; or that we're ugly. And I believe our spiritual healing happens when we begin to see beauty within ourselves. When we see that we truly were created in the image and likeness of God.

Genesis 1:27:

"So God created humankind in His image and in his likeness. Both male and female, he created them."

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross said:

"People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in their beauty is only revealed when the light within them shines."

Right? That we were born to be beautiful. That it's our spiritual job to be beautiful.

The Apostle Paul in his letter said:

"Now I look into the mirror dimly, but one day I will see face to face."

And I love this quote! Because the idea here is that, when we look into the mirror and we see dimly, we see the expression of God in a dim way. We see a little aspect of ourselves as an expression of God. But he says, *"One day I will see face to face."* That one day, we will be able to look in the mirror and see the face of God looking back at us. That we will be able to see our own beauty. We will be able to see our own divinity. We will be able to see the truth of who we truly are.

And for some of us, when we look in the mirror and we see only brokenness, we've really missed the whole spiritual point. Because you were created in the image and likeness of God. Like, we have to look again and see ourselves from the point of view that God sees us: that we are wholly beautiful. That we were created in God's image and in God's likeness. That you are beautiful!

Margaret Cho. I came across this quote and, you know, Margaret is a comedienne, an actress, a singer/songwriter. And I came across this quote and I think it is one of the most powerful quotes I have ever read. She said:

"I am so beautiful, sometimes people weep when they see me."

[Congregation laughs] Right? When we hear that, right? We think it's a joke! Right?

"I am so beautiful, sometimes people weep when they see me."

And I want you to hear the spiritual significance of what she says! She says:

"And it has nothing to do with the way I look really. It's just that I gave myself the power to say that I am beautiful. And if I could do that, maybe there is hope for them, too. And the great divide between beauty and ugliness will cease to be."

And then she gives this spiritual line that is 100% powerful as an enlightened being:

"Because we can all be what we choose to be."

Like, that's just spiritual truth! When you claim the truth of who you are -- when you claim yourself as light or joy or peace or abundance -- that reflects out in every direction. And when we claim ourselves as beautiful, we actually are revealing the glory of God that's within us all.

Like, ugliness does not express the glory of God. Brokenness does not express the glory of God. But when we have the courage to say, *"I am beautiful!"* -- like, that's a little tricky for us! How many of you were raised in an environment where you were taught not to think too much about yourself? Like, it's

tricky for us! Because if we say, "*I am beautiful*," am I supposed to say it with a straight face? Am I supposed to say it in a way that people don't giggle if they heard me say it? Could I really have the gumption -- and that's the only word I can think of! -- the gumption to claim, "*I am beautiful!*"?

Together: [with congregation] "*I am beautiful!*"

Now let's say it like we really mean it! Together: [with congregation] "*I am beautiful!*"

Now, how'd that feel? Did that kind of stick coming out? Or could you say it with clarity and power? As a spiritual being, the truth is: If you're created in the image and likeness of God, how could you be anything else but beautiful?!?

And as you unleash the full power of your power, can you imagine that power is going to impact people around you? As you stand in the beauty of who you are, and give yourself permission to express the glory of God -- the beauty of God that's within you -- then the people around you are going to feel it, too!

Finding your own inner beauty is a part of your spiritual journey. Because you can't get to full enlightenment and stay in your ugliness. You can't get to full enlightenment and stay in your brokenness. Because your brokenness -- your ugliness -- actually prevents you from knowing oneness with God. If God is beautiful, then you literally have to be beautiful to know oneness with God! We have to be able to claim that we truly are created in the image and likeness of God. And whatever God is, I have to be! If God is beautiful, then I have to be beautiful!

You know, for thousands of years, we have built beautiful temples and shrines and sacred things to God, and it was okay if they were beautiful, but it wasn't okay if we were beautiful. So we could create these things with stained glass and gold and silver and jewels and everything that we can find to give respect and honor to God while we, for ourselves, had to claim that we were much less than that. That the sanctuaries could be beautiful, but I can't be that! But we have to be that! Because we are that! Because that is God's nature. And if that is God's nature, it has to be our nature.

"I am beautiful."

Will you say that with me? [With congregation]: "*I am beautiful.*"

[Laughs] Okay; just say it one more time. Before your head pops off, just say it one more time, okay? One more time. Ready? Here we go:

[With congregation]: "*I am beautiful!*"

Now, we're going to stretch -- really stretch. I want you to turn to somebody else and just say, "*I am beautiful.*"

Together; it's okay! [With congregation]: "*I am beautiful!*"

"I am beautiful!"

Right?

And I want you to hear that! Like, if you are any aspect of God; if you are truly created in the image and likeness of God, how could you not be beautiful?!? Your brokenness does not move you closer to God; it actually makes you further away from God.

"I am beautiful!"

Together: [with congregation] "*I am beautiful.*"

And that's not your ego. It's not! Your spirit; your essence; your light is beautiful! And when you claim it -- when you allow yourself to express it fully and completely -- it actually moves you closer to the Divine.

"I am beautiful!"

Together: [with congregation] *"I am beautiful!"*

So are you ready for your homework? No ... [Congregation laughs] I want you to make room for beauty in your life. I want you to make a bigger space for beauty in your life. I want you to claim it; I want you to give thanks for it; I want you to set an intention for beauty in your home; in your life; in your words; in your actions. That you may be beautiful. That what comes out of you is beautiful. That what you see inside of you is beautiful.

Healing our planet requires us to own our beauty. Our brokenness is never going to heal this planet. Our ugliness is never going to heal this planet. The only way that we can ever come back to ourselves -- the only way that we can profoundly heal -- is when we have the courage to claim the beauty that is within us.

Your homework this week is to look for beauty everywhere, including yourself. To call it forth; to see it; to speak about it; to give thanks for it; to celebrate it. That you are beautiful.

One more time and then I'll get off of it:

[With congregation]: *"I am beautiful!"*

Will you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God that is right here, right now. Today, we come back to ourselves; we come back to our God. And to truly come back to God, we can't come back to God as ugly; as broken; as less than. We have to see ourselves in a new way; we have to see ourselves the way God sees us: from the highest point of view.

"I am beautiful." For I was created from God! In the image and in the likeness of God! I am beautiful! I am beautiful because God in me is beautiful; holy, sacred beauty!

Today, we give thanks for all that we are; for all the ways that we see ourselves from a new way; from a new light. *"I am beautiful."* And so it is. Amen.

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