

August 12, 2018  
Series: Summer in the Psalms

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**John 1:1-5, 14**  
**Psalm 28:1, 4, 11-14**

**“On Seeing the Beauty of God”**

*One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to living in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord. – Psalm 27:4*

If you could ask God for one thing what would it be? One thing. That isn't easy. We ask God for many things, don't we? And we should. We *need* so many things: healing, health, and hope. We have dreams for our children, and all our loved ones; we want them to be faithful and strong. We ask God's forgiveness and pray for protection. We do this every day, and on Sunday we gather our prayers together in this worship time. We go to God pleading for everything from world peace to a newborn baby's safe arrival.

No we don't want one thing. We want everything.

At least I do. I admit it, I do. This brief and beautiful life is stuffed full of so many choices and opportunities. If you are like me you want to experience them all! Maybe I'm greedy that way. Have you ever been to a Tapas restaurant? They serve small plates, just a few bites. I open the menu with each delicious dish described there, and each of them costs about \$3-4. I want to order 12! I want everything.

In the 1976 version of *A Star is Born*, Barbara Streisand sang:

I'd like to plan a city, play the cello  
Play at Monte Carlo, play Othello  
Move into the White House, paint it yellow  
Speak Portuguese and Dutch  
And if it's not too much  
I'd like to have the perfect twin  
One who'd go out as I came in ...  
I'd never sleep; I'd only sing  
Give me everything, everything.<sup>i</sup>

How about you? What is the one thing you would ask? Is that unfair? Aladdin got three things. How would you ever choose one?



What if there was one thing that summed up all the others? One thing! Today's psalm says that one is enough. It says that there is one thing that can hold every hope and fear, every desire. Listen:

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
whom then shall I fear?  
The Lord is the strength of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid? ...*

*One thing have I asked of the Lord;  
one thing I seek;  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life;  
to behold the fair beauty of the Lord  
to seek God in the temple.*

*You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face."  
Your face, Lord, will I seek.  
Hide not your face from me,  
nor turn away your servant in displeasure.*

*You have been my helper;  
Cast me not away;  
Do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.  
Though my father and my mother forsake me,  
the Lord will sustain me.*

*Show me your way, O Lord;  
lead me on a level path, because of my enemies.  
Deliver me not into the hand of adversaries,  
for false witnesses have risen up against me,  
and also those who speak malice.  
What if I had not believed  
That I should see the goodness of the Lord  
In the land of the living!*

*O tarry and await the Lord's pleasure;  
be strong, and the Lord shall comfort your heart;  
wait patiently for the Lord.*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray silently for a moment.

One thing I asked of the Lord – to dwell in the house of the Lord, to see the beauty of the Lord, and to seek God in the temple. “Now, it seems like [the psalmist] has smuggled in three things here.”<sup>ii</sup> Craig Barnes said that, and it might be true. But is it possible that they are actually the same thing? What if dwelling in God's house, experiencing God's beauty and seeking God's

truth are so perfectly joined, interconnected, woven together --that you can't have one without the others?<sup>iii</sup>

In John 1:14 that Sue/Ed just read for us, John, the gospel writer, announces that God's beauty, *the true light*, perfect truth, *has come into the world ... and we have seen his glory*, his splendor, his preeminence and honor and his light.

For John, truth and beauty are very close to the same thing. They're bound up together, particularly when it comes to worshipping God. You know this: truth without beauty is moralism, an unendurable holier-than-thou. And beauty without truth is insubstantial and false, like a mask with no face behind it. "Truth without beauty is unendurable [and] beauty without truth is disposable."<sup>iv</sup>

"But when beauty and truth hold hands it is always a call to worship."<sup>v</sup> The eighth century architect of England's Glastonbury Abbey wrote: "I want to create a church so beautiful that it would move even the hardest heart to prayer."<sup>vi</sup> Music, art, architecture, nature – when they are true – should bring us to our knees, because we cannot follow Jesus Christ without coming to worship him. And what happens when we worship him? We "behold his beauty, and inquire more deeply into his truth."<sup>vii</sup>



Don Roland is one of our Woods elders and the founder of our Photography Ministry. He posted this on Monday. I have to tell you, when I saw that my first response wasn't "Gee, Don is a great photographer," which he is, but that wasn't my first response. My first thought when I saw this was "praise God from whom all blessings flow." Truth and beauty are linked, and when they are present at the same time they lead to worship.

There was a day in the life of Jesus when he and some of his disciples were in the home of Mary and Martha, in Bethany. Martha complained to Jesus that Mary wasn't helping in the kitchen. Remember this one? Martha was right; she wasn't. Instead of dutifully serving alongside her sister, she was sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to him teach. She was beholding the beauty in his truth and worshipping God. Jesus knew that about Mary. I imagine that he could see it in her face, and read it in her body language. When he heard Martha's complaint he responded this way. He said, *Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, only one thing is necessary; Mary has chosen that which cannot be taken from her.*<sup>viii</sup>

One thing. Only one thing is needful – *to live in the presence of the God, to dwell in God's house*, to see, hear, touch, taste and smell God's truth and beauty all our days.

The problem is the stupid dishes. They don't do themselves! It's Martha's dilemma. Lutheran pastor and author, Ed Marquart wrote about that. He said:

"In a world in which we are so busy dusting plastic flowers that we don't have the time to smell the real ones; in a world where the glare [of our safety lights] is so bright that we

cannot see the stars; in a world in which violence and brutality rules so many hearts rather than the beauty of God; in this kind of world, I need, you need, and the world around us needs the beauty of the Lord living inside of our souls.”<sup>ix</sup>

The beauty of God, the perfect Truth of God, are bound up together in Jesus Christ. He came as the Light of the World to give us the light of truth, and that is everything.

Psalm 27 declares that the Lord’s light is sufficient to calm our fears, and there are many, at least for me there are. I am nervous, and my guess is that you are too, concerned about the demonstrations taking place in DC this afternoon. It is hard to understand how any American could make claims of racial inequality and white supremacy in this land where THE founding principle is equality of all people. It makes no sense, and it’s ugly, marring the image of God in the land.

But as the song says, “God’s truth is marching on.”

I remember the day several years ago; it was the day the Westboro Baptist “Church” came to town. Just a handful of people, about 6 or 8 in all, showed up and stood on the street corner near St. Anne’s Church shouting angry chants and holding obscene signs. So much hate. They’d announced they were coming in advance. (They like a lot of media coverage.) A friend asked if I wanted to go join the counter protest. It was winter, right around Christmas, as I recall, windy and 12 degrees. I almost didn’t go, I didn’t want to stand outside and freeze while gazing upon something so hideous, but my friend was persistent.

We had to park about a half mile away. As we climbed the hill to Church Circle, we were surprised to hear worship sounds, Christmas songs, coming from what turned out to be 200 or 300 people standing in the church yard at St. Anne’s singing their counterpoint to the Westboro chants, lovely harmonies that all but drowned out the other group’s ugly shouts. The St. Anne’s crowd spilled out of the St. Anne’s gates onto the sidewalk. The mayor was there, and so were the reporters, with their cameras pointing, not on the people holding ugly, degrading signs, but at the singers instead.

It was a VERY cold day, the cold from the frozen ground shot through my boots and numbed my feet, but I didn’t care because the music of the crowd wrapped around me. I felt “strangely warmed”, as the Methodists like to say, embraced by *the fair beauty of the Lord*.

It was not what I expected. Like so many other times in my life I was startled by the truth and beauty of our God, the splendid Savior whose words ring through the centuries with their beauty:

*“Love one another.”<sup>x</sup>*

*“Will not the shepherd leave 99 on the hillside to go and seek out the one that is lost?”<sup>xi</sup>*

*“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”<sup>xii</sup>*

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.”<sup>xiii</sup>*

*“Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life.”<sup>xiv</sup>*

Beautiful words, but they are more than words. They are beautiful words that point to eternal truth that sets the world free.

Beloved, that's why we come to worship. Let Christ's beauty be your inspiration, let his truth be your salvation, let his resurrection be your triumph, let his light be your shield. You are never alone. *To live in the house of the Lord all our days, to see the beauty of the Lord, and to seek after his truth* – that is more than everything; it is the only thing.

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<sup>i</sup> "Everything" Paul Williams and Rupert Holmes, *A Star is Born*, Columbia records, 1976

<sup>ii</sup> M. Craig Barnes, from a sermon preached at Princeton Theological Seminary, October 2, 2017

<sup>iii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>iv</sup> Allan Mott "Fancy Pants Exploitation: Gate of Flesh" *Vanity Fair*, June 9, 2013

<sup>v</sup> Barnes, *op. cit.*

<sup>vi</sup> "Goodness, Beauty and Truth" [catholicquotations.com/truth-and-beauty](http://catholicquotations.com/truth-and-beauty)

<sup>vii</sup> Barnes, *op.cit*

<sup>viii</sup> Luke 10:38-42

<sup>ix</sup> Edward F. Marquart, "The Beauty of God" Epiphany 3A

<sup>x</sup> John 13:34

<sup>xi</sup> Matthew 18:12

<sup>xii</sup> Luke 23:34

<sup>xiii</sup> Revelation 3:20

<sup>xiv</sup> Revelation 2:10