

**“Beauty, Not Perfection”**

**Today’s message comes with an advisory due to the nature of the subject matter. Be advised that it may cause alarm and distress, although this isn’t the intent of the preacher. It’s not something you would expect in a sermon about beauty. Our text is from Ecclesiastes, a book that is not for the faint of heart.**

**You will never hear a TV preacher use it. I’ve not heard a sermon on it, other than my own, and today is only my second attempt. If you are new to reading the Bible, don’t read Ecclesiastes. If you need a word of comfort or consolation, don’t read Ecclesiastes. If you are depressed and struggling to find a purpose in life, don’t read Ecclesiastes.**

**If you get the nerve to read it, you will wonder, “What on earth is it doing in the Bible?”**

**Ecclesiastes was written by an unknown person named *Qoheleth*, which means, “The Questor,” or “The Preacher.” Whatever his name, his outlook is bleak:**

**Smoke, nothing but smoke. There’s nothing to anything...  
One generation goes its way, the next arrives, but nothing changes—its business as usual for old planet earth.**

**The sun comes up and the sun goes down, then it does it again, and again...**

**Everything is boring, utterly boring—no one can find any meaning in it. What was will be again, what happened will happen again. Does someone call out, “Hey, this is new”? Don’ get excited. It’s the same old story.**

**Dark. Bleak. Cynical. And this is just the first chapter!**

In chapter two the Preacher looks back on life and all the things he did in search of pleasure and wisdom. He built mansions. He planted orchards, vineyards, gardens and forests. He had more flocks than he could count. He had silver and gold galore. He had wine, women, and song, and never denied himself pleasure. He toiled and sweated to find pleasure in his work, and he concluded: *“I looked at all I had done and all I had spent doing it, and behold, all was vanity and chasing after the wind, and nothing was to be gained under the sun.”* This is the word of the Lord.”

Mr. Gloom should have spent more time in his gardens. It wouldn't have mattered if they were flower, vegetable or rock gardens. If he hadn't tried so hard to get life all figured out; if he had learned to sit still and take deep drinks of the bounty and beauty of life, maybe he wouldn't have been such a sour puss. I know-- I'm exaggerating. Exaggerating is what we preachers do to get you to pay attention to your life and your part in God's story. We overstate things in hopes that you will see beneath the surface and notice like you haven't noticed before.

The writer of Ecclesiastes sought satisfaction on its own terms. He tried to take life as it was with no expectation that it would give him something more or better. This is nothing wrong, but we miss a lot if we only see appearances and race through life on the great garden called Earth and miss what matters.

Humans have hungers, among them food and beauty. The hunger for food can be satisfied. We eat our fill and get up from the table. But the hunger for beauty cannot be satisfied. The more we see the more we want to see. We see sights beyond description—things so wonderful that it hurts.

John Berryman wrote, “Master of beauty, craftsman of the snowflake, inimitable contriver, endower of Earth so gorgeous and different from the boring Moon, thank you for such as it is my gift.” Phillip Yancey has a friend who knows what Berryman means. She visited Yancey's home that is located at the foot of the Colorado Rockies. She was going blind and was traveling to

her favorite places to see them one last time. She was storing the sights in her memory to enjoy when her world grew dark.

The Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart said, “If the soul could have known God without the world, the world would never have been created.” In a few moments we will gather at the prayer garden and sing, “This Is My Father’s World.” The third verse ends with this declaration, “He speaks to me *everywhere*.” This doesn’t mean we will sense God wherever we look. The world *conceals* as much of God as it *reveals*. It doesn’t mean that the beauty we behold in art and nature or the beauty we hear in music, poetry, and literature is as close to God as we can get.

The great philosopher, Immanuel Kant said, “Two things fill me with constantly increasing admiration and awe, the longer and more earnestly I reflect on them: the starry heavens without and the Moral Law within.” God has planted within us an innate sense of when things aren’t as they are supposed to be. Kant gazed into the same starry sky as the Psalmist who 2,500 years earlier wrote: “O Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! When I look at the heavens, the moon and the stars that you established, who are humans that you should remember them and care for them?”

At age seven, my son taught me a spiritual truth. We were walking through a field of Christmas trees and I said, “Let find a perfect one.” John said, “Nothing is perfect in nature, but there’s sure a lot of beauty.” Nature can’t be explored with protractors because it has no perfect angles.

Yogi Berra once said, “The more you look, the more you see.” He was right. The more we meditate upon this great Garden we call home, the more we realize that it doesn’t belong to us. The more we look the more we see that the world isn’t spit up between the physical and material.

We are about to dedicate our prayer garden. The more we look at it the more we’ll see that it’s colors are from God’s palette. The more we look the more we will see those in whose memory the flowers and trees are planted. The more we look the more we’ll

**see that the Creator of redwoods and lilies is the Creator who gives us life. The more we look the more we'll see that like flowers, we, too will blossom and flourish and in time wither and fade. The more we look the more we'll see that like the water flowing over rocks, we are carried on the currents of God's love through the halls of time.**

**I try to heed the wisdom of the writer Annie Dillard who said, "Beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will sense them. The least we can do is try to be there." They seem to me like good words on which to end. BE THERE.**