

*“Cultivating Spiritual Practices: Beauty”*  
Psalm 27:1-4  
Aspen Community United Methodist Church  
May 1, 2011

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The Psalmist wants to behold the beauty of the Lord.  
He wants to learn more – see more – be within the beauty of the Lord.

Last week we celebrated the risen Christ.  
Not the Jesus whose parables and encounters with people -  
his teaching – his healing – his journey  
make up most of the Sundays of our year.

The risen Christ becomes more than that.  
The risen Christ is all about how God is active in our lives.

The risen Christ draws us toward hope -  
hope that our lives will have purpose and meaning.

The cross and resurrection also convey the message that  
there are many ways to die without physical death.

And there are times to rejoin the living -  
to let go of the old and receive the new.

But – how are some ways to do that?

I began to think about resurrection as a way to live  
as if it were a verb – an action.

If we do that -  
we can be more concrete  
about how to make it a part of our daily lives.  
We could call it principles for living in the resurrection.

We began last week with “attention” -  
being awake – what Jesus was asking of his disciples.

To be attentive to the world in front of us -  
to be mindful – is something most spiritual teachers both live and teach.  
To develop mindfulness is a way to live the resurrection.  
We paid attention to (pun intended) to being attentive  
to life as it plays out before us.

Today I want to give you “beauty” as a spiritual practice.  
What does it mean to practice “beauty” as a way to be more alive?

Beauty seems to be a combination of qualities.

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It may have to do with shape – color – form that is pleasing -  
perhaps to the eye – or the ear – or the intellect – or to our sense of the good.

It seems to be something we experience through the senses.  
But it also seems to be a state of our mind and heart.

We might say it is something we view – or hear or experience with the senses.  
And - it is something we are.



When we look at something that we think is beautiful  
we may be recognizing a pattern found in nature  
a pattern used in art and mathematics and design  
that is aesthetically pleasing.

The pattern or formula is called the golden mean or the golden ratio.  
The golden ratio appears over and over in nature from seashells  
to the structure of the universe.

You can see it in a flower and in a snail and in the structure of DNA.

It is seen in the pyramids - the Parthenon -  
and yesterday in the proportions of Westminster Abbey.

But – you can also see it in this room.

There is beauty in things we see around us.

There is simplicity to beauty.

But we often miss it – so some principles might be helpful.

For example -  
if you remove clutter in your home or workplace -  
you are able to see the beauty in simple objects -  
a table – a window framing a scene from outside -  
a texture in a cloth laid upon a wooden table.

Someone suggested that to enjoy more beauty in our own homes  
we need to clear out any clutter.

More beauty will be there for our eyes to see  
if we make room for it to appear.

Sometimes it's the clutter in our minds.

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And – we are less likely to see something special  
in the environment if our mind is too full of thoughts.

So – there is a little about looking at beauty.



A writer for National Geographic wrote of the illusive nature of beauty.

“One may as well dissect a soap bubble.  
We know it when we see it – or so we think.

Philosophers frame it as a moral equation.  
What is beautiful is good, said Plato.  
“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,” wrote John Keats.  
Anatole France thought beauty “more profound than truth itself.”

It seems also that the more experiences we have  
and the more we embrace the depth and diversity of life  
the more generous we are with describing beauty.

Here is an example.  
Henry James met the English novelist George Eliot  
when she was 49 years old.  
*Silas Marner*, *Adam Bede*, and *The Mill and the Floss* were behind her.  
She was yet to write *Middlemarch*.  
“She is magnificently ugly.” He wrote to his father.  
“She has a low forehead, a dull grey eye, a vast pendulous nose,  
a huge mouth, full of uneven teeth...  
Now in this vast ugliness resides a most powerful beauty  
which, in a very few minutes,  
steals forth and charms the mind,  
so that you end as I ended, in falling in love with her.”

In fairy tales, only the pure of heart  
could discern the handsome prince in the ugly frog.

Somewhere in our growth we come to know that  
we will see more beauty through our eyes  
if beauty resides in our hearts.

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There are other ideas about beauty.  
“Beauty is all the wonderful creative things that a person is,  
how they handle themselves and treat other people.

Someone else writes about beauty  
in contrast to ugliness.<sup>1</sup>

There is false beauty that is superficial and short-lived.  
And, there is true beauty that is deep-seated and forever.  
At times they co-exist. At times they do not.  
One is understated, the other overstated.  
One is likely to offer surprises  
while the other may reveal disappointments.

One is real, the other perceived.

We can be disappointed when we do not find  
goodness where we thought it should reside.



And then there is the line by Oscar Hammerstein,  
“Do you love me because I’m beautiful,  
or am I beautiful because you love me?”

If a person has beauty within, and is loved,  
it becomes visible on the surface, as a glow.

It is revealed as happiness,  
an ease of conversation, a comfort to another soul.  
This beauty does not suffer the passage of time  
but rather grows each day.



So – there are a few thoughts about beauty.  
It is not exhaustive – and that would be impossible.  
But - can we pull out a few principles  
that will help us take on “beauty” as a spiritual practice?

Surely one would be to take the time to enjoy what our senses bring us.  
Make some space for beauty to emerge in your world.

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Clear out some clutter and you will be surprised  
what you will begin to see.  
You will likely discover something beautiful  
that just needed a little space around it.

Notice shapes and ratios in art and in nature -  
the spirals and fractals –  
that compose what is pleasing to the eye.  
And when you do this – more and more will come into view.

These things have to do with looking out.  
The second part has to do with the place from which we look -  
our heart and mind.

When you encounter someone new -  
pay attention to what is going on inside.  
See if you are less likely to see the beauty  
if you are rigid or simply have already made up your mind.

And finally...  
Realize the beauty in you -  
the wisdom you have gained –  
the way you have worked through the calamities of your life -  
the things you have learned that you can impart to others –  
by the way you live – and by the way you care.  
Polish the events of your life  
so they no longer have the jagged edges.  
You have accepted the past –  
and there is beauty to that.

Or to put it another way -  
you have let beauty make a home in your heart.

Those are my thoughts and most of them will appear in the images before you.

See what you think.

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Magee, M.D. *The Book of Choices*, p. 84