

How beautiful

Isaiah 52:7-12

December 10, 2006

It's beautiful ...

Music is beautiful. Voices and bells, organ and piano, guitars and drums, trumpets and flutes. Music is beautiful, not just because it's "pleasing to the ear," but because it engulfs us and draws us in for a time into the new world that it creates. No, it's more than that. Music changes this world. Music changes us, transforming our moods and our emotions in beautiful ways.

The sanctuary is beautiful. The royal blue of the paraments, the deep green of garlands and wreaths and tree, the soft burgundy of ribbons and bows, the purple of the advent candles and the gold of the bells. But the decorated sanctuary is beautiful in another way, too, as it sparks our imaginations and brings to mind beautiful memories of other Christmases.

Nolan is beautiful. A child precious in the eyes of his mother and father. A child precious in eyes of God. What is it we find so beautiful in a young child? Perhaps it is the beauty of innocence, of possibility, of promise, of life fresh and new and eager.

Love is beautiful. The beauty of the love of a mother for her son. The beauty of the love shared between husband and wife. The last wedding I did in this sanctuary was Jen and Dusty's wedding, when we witnessed that day the beauty of their love for each other, not just romantic love, but a deeper love that will change and grow and grow up over a lifetime. I saw too the beauty of the love in Steve's Thorpes eyes as he told me of thirty-seven families in Nicaragua holding in their hands a key, a key to a new home.

Life is beautiful. It is! In spite of the hardship, in spite of the struggle, in spite of the pain, in spite of the ugliness. Life is beautiful in its fullness, its complexity, its surprises, its wonders, wonders even in the midst of what seems routine and mundane, wonders we notice when we stop and look.

Peace is beautiful.

*How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger
who announces peace.*

Look! Someone is coming! Someone is coming over the mountains, coming to us! What news does he bring us? News of war? News of death? News of disease and disaster and destruction? News of hatred and enmity and injustice and oppression?

He says it's good news. Good news! He says our God reigns! God is in charge. The tyrannies of this world are at an end. The empires of this world have been brought to nothing and the kingdom of God is at hand! There is no more war, no more grief or crying or pain.

We have a home and our home is safe. The stranger need not be feared, but welcomed. The hungry are fed and the homeless have a new home. The sick have been given a cure for their illnesses and the lonely have been given a friend to love and to love them. The oppressed have been given justice and slaves have been set free.

He brings news of peace. How beautiful! How beautiful it will be when that messenger comes to us ...

That messenger has come to us. The messenger who brings good news. The messenger who was announced this way:

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth ... peace.

He brings peace. He makes peace. He is our peace. He gives us the gift of his peace, a peace that is utterly beyond human comprehension.

He has come, bringing good news, bringing peace, real peace, not just "peace of mind." How sad, how pitiful, it is for us when we think that his best gift to us is "peace of mind." When you think about it, "peace of mind" is really a rather selfish virtue. As long as I remain calm and contented and unruffled, what does it matter if all hell is breaking loose around me?!!

It does matter! He has come bringing real peace, peace that is rich and full and productive life, not just for some, but for all. Peace that is intimate communion with God. Peace that is people reconciled with each other, nations reconciled with each other, people living in harmony with the creatures of the earth and with the earth itself. How beautiful!

A gunman walks into an Amish schoolhouse bringing death, but he and the family he leaves behind are met there by peace. How beautiful!

After being nominated as the next president of Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, Pastor Joel Hunter urges the membership to expand their vision, to consider the whole agenda of Jesus, not just opposition to abortion and to gay marriage, but compassion for the poor and attention to the economic policies that exacerbate poverty, concern for the earth and attention to environmental policies that put the future integrity of land and climate at risk. How beautiful!

Pastors and people and churches say, *No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here*, and mean it. How beautiful!

*How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger
who announces peace.*

How beautiful are you when you announce peace, when you make peace.

When you choose to forgive the one who has caused you injury, instead of seeking revenge. How beautiful!

When you choose to love the one who hates you, instead of hating in return. How beautiful!

When you welcome a stranger into your church, when you welcome a refugee into your town. How beautiful!

When you write a letter of encouragement to a person in prison, when he or she has been forgotten and written off by everybody else. How beautiful!

When you choose to make sacrifices, to make changes in your own accustomed lifestyle, for the sake of the planet and for the sake of those who will occupy it. How beautiful!

I invite you this morning to celebrate beauty. The beauty of the messenger ... Jesus. The beauty of the message ...peace The beauty of the message coming to life in us ...
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God!