

In the turmoil and evil on the loose in our world, one of the ways we can find rest and refreshment for our souls and keep centered on the Lord, is in appreciating His touches of beauty. Last week Bruce and Becky and Keith and I went to St Petersburg Florida for my birthday outing. St. Petersburg is emerging as an art center, certainly in Florida, for artists whose medium is stained and blown glass. Our first stop was the Duncan McClellan Gallery. It was simply beautiful. One glass sculpture seemed to surpass another in its creativity in color, line and shape. As it nurtured my soul, it brought me to the theme of beauty this week. To start our thinking on this issue, I want to open with praise - two hymns that celebrate the beauty all around us. First, the beauty of creation and the beauty of human love. And second, the eyes to see this beauty because we have experienced God's love:

1. For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies,
For the love which from our birth over and around us lies
Refrain: Lord of all to thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise.
For the wonder of each our of the day and of the night
Hill and vale and tree and flower, sun and moon and stars of light
Refrain: Lord of all to thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise.
For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child
Friends on earth and friends above, for all gentle thoughts and mild
Refrain: Lord of all to thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise.
(folliott Pierpoint)

2. Heaven above is softer blue, earth around is sweeter green, something lives in every hue
Christless eyes have never seen! Birds in song his glories show,
Flowers with deeper beauties shine since I know as now I know, I am His and He is mine.
since I know as now I know, I am His and He is mine.
(words: George Robinson, music: James Mountain)

Beauty in Glass Sculptures



Ever since I became a Christian, beauty and color have energized my spirit and elicited praise to the Lord. And this is God's plan. I believe that when we enter into new life in Christ, He opens our eyes to see His glories as our Creator and see creation itself in a whole new way. Indeed! Our day at the gallery became a source of wonder and praise and joy for me. Beauty that refreshed my soul.

Here are a few glass sculptures for your enjoyment as well: The one on the left is in honor of peoples in the world. The one on the right is named deep wave.



Each piece was showcased separately with special lighting and I came away so grateful that God made people in His image, reflecting the creativity all around us. This teardrop shape glass on the left with its color and the beauty of the ribbons streaming down from the top was one of my favorites as was deep wave. So much energy and joy in these pieces.



Then we went on to the Chihuly Collection and saw small pieces like this green glass on the right and huge pieces in a myriad of layered shapes and sizes that took up most of a room.



The creativity was energizing. That's the power of beauty.

We also went to a glass blowing demonstration and saw each step of the process an artist goes through to create these objects of beauty. The initial glob of would-be glass, the molding process, the instruments involved, the water, the repeated firings. There were 2 ovens firing at full blast, plus fans whirring, a giant refrigerator humming, tables for rolling out the glass shape, instruments for creating that shape and 2 other ovens ready to be fired as needed. It made me appreciate all God goes through, with His end vision in mind of who we are made to be. Glass blowing is a painstaking, hot and noisy project to create something of infinite worth. Just like us.

But the theme of beauty has other dimensions I want us to consider as well.

2. Beauty in the environment shared with people we love

St. Petersburg turns out to be a beautiful city and it was a joy to share that beauty together with family.



3. God gives us His beauty

God not only creates beauty in this world, but He gives His beauty to His followers. In fact, Ezekiel tells the story of salvation in terms of beauty – this time the beauty God gives His people as He washes them clean and adorns them with His righteousness, like beautiful embroidered garments. He actually gives us His splendor:

Ezekiel 16:8-14: ⁸“And when I passed by again, I saw that you were old enough for love. So I wrapped my cloak around you to cover your nakedness and declared my marriage vows. I made a covenant with you, says the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.

⁹“Then I bathed you and washed off your blood, and I rubbed fragrant oils into your skin. ¹⁰I gave you expensive clothing of fine linen and silk, beautifully embroidered, and sandals made of fine goatskin leather. ¹¹I gave you lovely jewelry, bracelets, beautiful necklaces, ¹²a ring for your nose, earrings for your ears, and a lovely crown for your head. ¹³And so you were adorned with gold and silver. Your clothes were made of fine linen and costly fabric and were beautifully embroidered. You ate the finest foods—choice flour, honey, and olive oil—and became more beautiful than ever. You looked like a queen, and so you were! ¹⁴Your fame soon spread throughout the world because of your beauty. I dressed you in my splendor and perfected your beauty, says the Sovereign LORD.” NLT

Psalms 90 picks up this theme as well. V.17: “May the beauty of the Lord our God rest upon us and establish the work of our hands.” Similarly, Isa. 61 promises that the Messiah comes to “comfort all who mourn and bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (61:2-3). And in the allegory in Song of Songs of God’s love for us is repeated in the phrase: “all beautiful you are, my darling, there is no flaw in you” (Song of Song: 4;7).

This is the amazing news of the gospel, beloved. The God who is the Creator of all the beauty in the universe calls us into His life and family and then bestows His beauty on us. It is an almost unfathomable thought. But the hymn referenced at the beginning of this sermon captures the praise this elicits. Loved with everlasting love, v. 1:

Loved with everlasting love, led by grace that love to know,
Spirit breathing from above, thou hast taught us it is so.
O this full and perfect peace; oh this rapture all divine. In a love that cannot cease,
I am His and He is mine. In a love that cannot cease, I am His and He is mine.
(words: George Robinson, Music: James Mountain)

Prayer: May you be refreshed by God’s beauty in the world and in color and shape and creativity and people this year, beloved. And may God’s beauty rest upon you so you reflect Him in this hurting world. For Jesus’s sake, Amen. Dr. Mary Lou Codman- Wilson, New Hope Global 11 12 20