

The Beautiful Thing

Matthew 26:1-16

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Prayer

Thank you, Father. We pray now that you would help us to preach. Send your Spirit, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Message

About thirty-two years ago, I took my father and best friend to Tijuana, Mexico. Soon my youth group from Los Angeles would be building homes for the desperately poor living in the abandoned city dump. I met a woman there who'd just given birth under a piece of carpet slung over a rope. From the dump you could see the suburbs of San Diego. For \$1,000 we could build one family a home.

On our way back to Los Angeles, we decided to stop at the Crystal Cathedral and take a tour; a bubbly church lady showed us around. At one point, she told us about their utterly impressive pipe organ. I can't remember the specifications, but it was something like the most expensive organ in the United States. She told us the cost, then with an immense smile, she said, "But, of course, it isn't our organ. It belongs to Jesus."

I thought of Jesus in the last and least of these in the Tijuana dump. I had taught the parable of the talents, and I grew indignant. I grabbed the woman by the throat and yelled: "Jesus doesn't need a pipe organ! What a waste! That organ could be sold and with the money, you could build thousands of homes for the desperately poor only one hundred of miles from this very spot!"

I shook her and yelled . . . in my mind . . . I didn't actually do it. But what a ridiculous, impractical woman.

By and large, women are rather ridiculous, impractical, and strange (said with laughter and humor). Amen?

At the time, I was newly married and coming to terms with this reality. My bride would go without food to spend our money on wooden ducks, silk flowers, and knick knacks. Why? Because they are "pretty."

On summer evenings it will literally be 90° in our house and 70° outside. I'll come home, and all the windows will be half open. Hundreds of times I've explained to my wife, "If you open the windows all the way, the room will cool down twice as fast."

She says, "Oh, yes. Okay." But she never opens the windows all the way. It finally occurred to me that she thinks half opened windows are beautiful. See? She'd rather roast and starve than live in a room without beauty.

If you say something is "beautiful," you're saying it's good for nothing. It's impractical. It's not good for some other reason. It's just good.

Well, Susan had a strange attitude toward beauty,
and a strange attitude toward pain.

Back then I thought she was a wimp because she wouldn't work out with me or climb mountains. She said it was too much of a pain.

I thought she was a wimp until three years later. I was standing next to her in an operating room holding her hand. She'd been in absolute agony for about twenty hours. There were complications. There was blood everywhere. She was passing out from the loss of blood, and pain. In all my days, I have never seen someone in that much pain. I remember thinking, "Enjoy this child 'cause this is the last one you'll get."

Well, the moment Susan saw our little Jonathan, she cried out, "Oh, I want another one!"

All that pain was entirely eclipsed by joy... the joy of creation.

Yet it was a strange kind of creating.

It wasn't creation by conquest and dominion (how men usually create).

It was creation by surrender and submission.

And what a creation! God's creation coming through her.

She bore His creation and endured unspeakable pain. They held Jonathan up. She cried, "Oh, I want another one!" and then said something like, "He's beautiful!"

"Beautiful?"

Now . . . I fell totally in love with Jon over the next few months, but I remember at the time thinking, "Beautiful? He looks like... a booger."

Have you ever seen a newborn baby?

Well, she had a strange attitude toward beauty,

And a strange attitude toward pain.

And this strange ability to see beauty in the midst of pain.

So I'm just saying, women are strange. Amen?

I wanted to grab this woman at the Crystal Cathedral and yell, "Why this waste?!"

Matthew 26:1-5

When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people."

[Peter starts singing.] "The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed." That's "Handel's Messiah," and it's Psalm 2:2.

In Israel, the king was anointed, and the high priest was anointed.

In Hebrew, "anointed" is pronounced "*mashiyach*."

The anointed is literally "the *mashiyach*," "the messiah," and in Greek "the Christ."¹

Next Verse,
Matthew 26:6

Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment [fragrant oil], and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste [apolia]?"

Apolia is translated "waste" or "perdition."

So, "What the hell?" might be a good translation.

"What the hell? Why the waste? This is scandalous."

It was scandalous for many reasons not the least of which was that the one who was doing the anointing was a woman. Moses anointed Aaron, the high priest. Samuel anointed King Saul and King David, and now a strange woman was anointing the Messiah.

In that society, women weren't allowed to eat with a male guest.

It was improper for them to even speak in public.

Everyday, Jewish men or boys were told to thank God that they had not been created a gentile, a slave, or a woman. And now a woman was anointing Jesus in public, and this was not the first time.

¹ They anointed the king, the priest, and in the case of someone dearly beloved they would anoint a corpse. Of course, this must've seemed like a terrible waste for the perfumed oil was ridiculously expensive.

Kings, priests, corpses and one other thing . . . the sanctuary and specifically the altar on which the fragrant offering was made. God makes a big deal of this in the Old Testament: fragrant oil or ointment, a pleasing aroma to God offered by the priest in the sanctuary.

According to Luke, earlier in Jesus' ministry, at a Pharisee's house, a prostitute anointed Jesus' feet with tears and perfumed ointment (ointment she had undoubtedly used to ply her trade), and then she let down her hair and wiped His feet.

According to John, just a few days before this anointing in Simon the leper's house, in Lazarus's house, Mary (the faithful disciple of Jesus and sister of Lazarus) anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair.

More liberal scholars say it all must have been just one incident written into these various occasions. I suspect it happened all the time—at least three times.

You know, Jesus' disciples were male, and yet there was like this pack of strange women that followed Jesus wherever He went, ministering to Him and His disciples, "Providing for them out of their means" according to Luke (Luke 8:3). That would have been costly, risky, scandalous, and strange. Strange for those male disciples. And now when things were really getting stressful, this unnamed woman dumps a fortune of perfumed oil on Jesus' head . . . not just His feet, His head.

Mark records that it was worth 300 denarii, a year's fair wage. What is that for you? \$50,000 . . . maybe \$150,000 . . . maybe the price of a fine pipe organ. A strange woman dumps that on the Messiah's head.

Jesus had just told the story of the sheep and goats and before that the parable of the talents. How could this be good stewardship and use of resources or talents? We're talking enough perfume to build one hundred houses in the Tijuana dump . . . enough money to feed the masses, start a revolution, inaugurate the Kingdom. Jesus had said, "The Kingdom is at hand." The Kingdom. . .

At this point, it appears that all the disciples were Zionists of one ilk or another. I mean by that, they hoped that Jesus would lead a political revolution, overthrowing the Roman oppressors, and establishing a just Hebrew society and homeland—the Kingdom.

In some form, I suppose that everyone is a Zionist at some point in their life:

- Americans pursue the American dream... "home of the free and the brave," like Zion.
- Moslems pursue the Nation of Islam... submission and peace, Jeru-salem (city of peace), like Zion.
- Marx taught the communists would create a new class of people... the perfect society, devoid of poverty, like Zion.
- Hitler taught the Aryans would purify a perfect race of people... the perfect society, like Zion.
- Many Zionists today work for a purified Jewish people group, in a purified Jewish State in Palestine . . . Zion.
- Christians also hope for Zion. We hope for the New Jerusalem.
Many seem to think we can produce it with the right strategy, programs, and even military conquest . . . and you see . . . all of that takes money.

Well, the disciples were Zionists, and I suspect the most ardent among them may have been Judas Iscariot. A few days before when Mary anointed Jesus, Judas protested. Now at Simon the Leper's house, they all protest with the words of Judas, "Why the waste, for this could have been sold, and the money given to the poor?"

"Why the waste?"

I imagine they meant more than just perfumed oil:

- For three years they'd followed Jesus, given up everything for Jesus or at least, what they expected from Jesus.
- They had seen Jesus feed the masses, heal the sick, walk on water, raise the dead and draw immense crowds ready to obey His every command.

But now,

- He had walked into Jerusalem, in the midst of remarkable opposition and against their better judgment.
- He had not raised an army, but only seemed to offend the powers that be, by busting up the temple, rebuking the scribes and Pharisees, and choosing to dine at a leper's house—Simon, the leper's house.

And worst of all, He had just told them that in two days he would be delivered up to be crucified . . . delivered up by Jews to Romans for crucifixion.

The disciples were obviously in denial—"Surely Jesus was speaking in metaphors. He couldn't really mean it." They must've thought, "Crucifixion would be an unconscionable and absolute waste."

I doubt that they could consciously process such an absurdity, but now when this strange woman dumps this fragrant oil on Jesus' head and robes, they just blurt out: "Why the waste for this could have been sold and the money given to the poor?"

See the problem?

The oil was good for something . . . other than Jesus.

And Jesus was good for something . . . other than Jesus.

To Judas and the disciples, Jesus was good for something. He was good for healing the sick, feeding the poor, building the Kingdom, and saving themselves.

To Judas and the disciples, Jesus was good for something.

To this woman, He was just good. He was beautiful.

You know all the disciples abandoned Jesus the next night when He no longer worked and was no longer good for something . . . but that pack of strange women stayed. They were at His cross: Mary Magdalene (who was literally a prostitute), Mary of Bethany, Mary Christ's mother . . . and this unnamed woman, maybe she was there. They—"The Marys" (the strange women)—were there.

They even tried to anoint His dead body. Why?

By visiting His tomb, they risked being raped and murdered by Roman soldiers. They were at His tomb. Why? It's clear from the story that they didn't expect Him to rise. He's dead. That's good for nothing.

I have a friend that was horribly abused by her Father. As a young woman, she ran away from home and came to know Jesus in another city. As a new believer she happened to attend a seminar led by a famous Christian teacher who seemed to say that if she did certain things, like forgive her parents and submit to her father, Jesus would work for her and "save her city," so to speak . . . that is he would make her heart, a fortress, like Zion, that could no longer be hurt.

So she moved back to the city from which she fled. Her father found her at this old apartment building where she was staying.

At the door he said, "I'm sorry."

So, she let him in, in order to forgive and submit.

He beat her, raped her, and left her bleeding on the floor with a broken rib.

She told me this story as we sat in a rental car in the parking lot of this apartment building. That morning, Susan and I had flown with her to this city to help her remember.

She said, "Peter, this is where I denied Jesus. I denied Him because He didn't work. I thought... I thought He was weaker than Satan."

I said, "But you came back to Him."

She said, "Yes."

I said, "Do you see what that means?"

You loved Him when He seemed to be good for nothing.

You loved Him when He didn't seem to work.

You loved Him naked, broken, and hanging on a cross."

She said, "Yeah, I guess so. You know, when I was beaten and raped again, I didn't deny Him, for I figured that even if He was weaker than Satan, I wanted Him... for He was good."

Not good for something, just good—*kalos* in Greek, beautiful.

I wonder what that means to Jesus?

Jesus is literally good for everything... And now He's shown that to my friend.

Jesus is literally good for everything...Jesus is good for everything, for everything is literally made by Him and sustained by Him.

- He is the Word of God, through whom all things are created.
- There is no force more powerful than the Word of God.

Jesus is good for everything, but until that day, with that strange woman, I wonder if anyone had ever loved Him when He was good for nothing . . . just good. Maybe Mary; a baby is like good for nothing—just good.

“Beautiful” means good for nothing . . . just good.

A sunset is beautiful whether or not you use it or don’t use it.

From our sermons on Genesis, and recently on Ecclesiastes, you may remember that “God alone is good” and so Jesus is like “The Good” in Flesh.

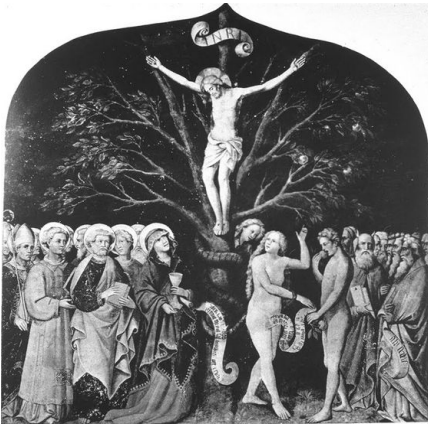


Figure 1 Image credit: Giovanni da Modena. Fresco from the Church of St. Petronio (Bologna, 1420)

And so in some amazing and mystical way, perhaps He is the fruit, hanging on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden, which is the very same location as the tree of life. If so, when Eve took the fruit from the tree, she took the life of the Good from the same tree, and so, she died . . . for the Life and the Good died. Jesus is the Life and the Good in flesh.

Well, in the same way, humanity took the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden when we took the life of Christ... and the sky grew black, the earth shook, and the Good died. And we died. (See 2 Cor. 5:14)

Eve saw the Good and took the Good because she saw that it was good for food and to make herself wise.

- She saw that it was good for something.
- It was good for making herself in the image of God.

What would it look like for someone to see the Good hanging on the tree and not take it because they thought it was good for something . . . but instead worship it . . . for it was good for nothing, just good?

[A clip of the Centurion kneeling and worshipping the cross is shown.]

What would it look like for someone to see the Good hanging on the tree and just worship the Good? To drop to their knees as the earth trembled and the sun failed and to say, "Surely this man was the son of God. This man was Good?"

Well, Jesus is literally, "Good for everything," But when He appears to be "good for nothing," most of us tend to think, "What a waste? What the hell? Why the waste?"

My father was a pastor, who acted a lot like Jesus, and got crucified like Jesus, and I watched it. He lost the church I grew up in and dearly loved and my heart thought, "What a waste."

It was then that I decided to go to seminary and become a pastor myself. I attended four years of seminary, was ordained and worked as an associate for four more years before I came back to Colorado and became the pastor of a little church on Lookout Mountain—a little church that in fifteen years became a very big church on the side of I-70 in Genesee.

I worked about 70 hard hours a week, which took a great toll on my wife and children, but the church grew. I saw God do amazing signs and wonders. I published two books and had agents vying for my attention. I had famous authors that called me "pastor." We built a multi-million dollar facility and were making plans to preach the Gospel of Relentless Love to the nations.

Over those fifteen years, I had discovered that Jesus died for all. And I discovered that His death was sufficient for all and even effectual for all by creating faith in all... And I discovered that satan kept us in lifelong bondage by convincing us that God didn't want to save us or that God couldn't save us and hadn't saved us in Jesus...

After fourteen years, my denomination said, "You can't say that God might save all. Unless you publicly say, "God can't save all and takes 'pleasure' in damning some...you will lose this Kingdom... that you have built... upon this mountain."

They put me on trial. Thousands of people had just raised millions to build a brand new state of the art facility. My children were all in youth group. One planned to be a pastor and one planned to be a missionary. They called staff members and elders aunts and uncles. We had started ministries in the Dominican Republic and around the world, delivering fresh water to the poor and the gospel to the nations. It was my Zion in more ways that I can possibly explain. And it was Zion for a few thousand others. You may have been one of them who would feel abandoned and betrayed by me if it all fell apart.

They put me on trial and I hoped that through the process of trying me they would begin to hear that God is better than we thought, the love of Jesus is deeper than we know, and that the Spirit is everywhere working the wonders of Mercy. They put me on trial and I hoped the dialogue would begin a reformation. They put me on trial but I don't believe

they listened. They just made their demands. I couldn't say what they wanted me to say . . . and so, they took it all away.

I can't even begin to express my grief. For nine and a half years, I've wanted to scream at the top of my lungs, "What a waste! What the hell, Jesus? Why the waste?" Sometimes serving Jesus just seems to be an absolutely colossal and even epic waste.

In Matthew 26:8 the disciples say, *"Why the waste?" For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor."* But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, *"Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful ['kalos ergon,' good work]" thing to me.*

For the entire Gospel of Matthew, Jesus has been talking about good works and outside of Jesus, this is the first one we've seen. This strange woman does a "*kalos ergon*" to Jesus. There are two words in Greek translated as "good": *agathos* and *kalos*.

Agathos suggests what is ethically good, as in good for something.

Kalos suggests what is intrinsically good—good for nothing, just good—and so *kalos* is often translated "beautiful."

Matthew 26:10 *"...she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will [do] not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial."*

"Burial..." This strange woman has anointed Jesus,

Not because He is King. . .

Not because He is high priest . . .

High Priest and King are good for a lot . . .

But she's anointing Him because soon He will be good for nothing.

Dead... doesn't that mean, basically, good for nothing?

The body is broken; the blood is shed . . .

Good for nothing . . . but good.

Some call that beautiful.

A High Priest who sacrifices Himself as a "fragrant offering" (Eph. 5:2). The King of Kings who descends into the depths of the earth. She couldn't comprehend all of that, but she could recognize beauty.

She sees the Beautiful One, then she does the beautiful thing—limitlessly, extravagantly, unselfconsciously—as if it were her nature.

"Truly I say to you," says Jesus, "wherever this Gospel is proclaimed in the whole world [cosmos] what she has done will also be told in memory of her [or as a memorial from her]." "Wherever and Whenever in all the cosmos..." as if her good work, her beautiful thing, is eternal, like an "eternal weight of glory beyond compare" (2 Cor. 4:17).

Jesus valued her deed above all things . . . as if all things were arranged to give birth to this deed. And the disciples called it, "a waste."

Do you remember what Jesus called Judas? “The son of waste,” (John 17:12) “the son of *apolia*,” perdition or waste. All Judas’s efforts to save the city, build the church, build Zion, and feed the poor . . . a waste.

And did you hear what Jesus said? “The poor you have with you always.”
That’s Deuteronomy 15:11, “ *For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, You shall open wide your hand,*” says the Lord.

Dang! What kind of a fund-raiser is that?
“Give to help the poor because we’ll always have the poor.”

Isn’t that rather defeatist? “You will always have the poor so give to the poor.”

Is that defeatist?
Yes, if you think the elimination of poverty is the goal.
And No, if you think the act of giving to the poor is the goal.

Yes, if you want a Marxist or capitalistic utopia in which mercy is obsolete.
And no, if you’re aiming for a Kingdom flowing with Mercy and red wine, like your body is constantly flowing with blood and life, where mercy is not obsolete but absolute.²

Yes, if you hate mercy.
And No, if you love it . . . if you love Love.

If all... love mercy, then all enjoy poverty and riches, receiving and giving, giving and receiving, and no one worries about keeping.

Well, this woman sees mercy, receives mercy, and bears mercy as if it were the painful fruit of her own womb. She bears mercy, and the mercy is worship, and it is eternal.

² The poor you will always have for all time. Poor is a broad word. It covers all types of poverty... all need. So Church...You will never have enough money.You will never have enough children’s workers.You will never finish preaching the Gospel.You will never build Zion, produce Utopia, not in this world, not in time, not you. The world has been subjected to futility, and you can’t fix it!

“Isn’t that rather defeatist?” For us, yes. We’re defeated. But is it defeatist for God? Yes, if you think His purpose is to grow economic prosperity in this world. But no, if you think His purpose is to grow mercy, and faith, and hope, and love. For where does that stuff grow? Only in poverty. Only in need. Only in the broken soil of our pain, dirt, and shame... like an empty womb into which God speaks His seed, His *sperma*, His Word of Mercy which bears the fruit of mercy.

So, the means are the ends, and the end is the means. I mean, mercy is not simply a means to end poverty. Poverty is a means to grow mercy—*hesed*, covenant love, grace. This whole fallen world, with all its suffering, is a means to grow mercy.

Love expressed—mercy—is the harvest of the earth. Mercy is the grain and grapes, the bread and wine reaped in Revelation 14, the body broken and the blood shed. Mercy is the Judgment of God. God is Mercy. So Jesus is Mercy in flesh—like wine in an earthen vessel. Jesus is the Good, hanging on a tree in the Garden where His body is laid. Not just good for something . . . but Good.

He is beautiful . . . beautiful beyond description.
He is Beauty.

And this strange woman was the only one that saw it—saw Him that day.

In two days, His Body would be broken and life would pour out.
And so now, her flask is broken and a fragrant offering poured out.

Jesus said, “The son of man... will be crucified,”
And she worshiped God’s mercy, with mercy.
Jesus said, “The son of man... will be crucified,”
And the disciples thought, “What a waste.”

You see, His crucifixion is the *krisis*—the judgment, the separation, of this world.
George Buttrick wrote, “Let no man stand at the foot of the cross and say, ‘Why this waste?’” Judas thought such mercy was a waste, and so He’d fix things.

Many scholars think he betrayed Jesus in order to press the Lord’s hand and start a rebellion, and that’s the reason he hung himself, for he saw that Jesus chose to be crucified rather than lead a violent revolution in response to His arrest.

Others think he just wanted the money.

Whatever the case, Judas anointed himself savior, and decided he’d fix things.

We took a family vacation with my friend, the excavator. We went to the Grand Canyon. As we stood on the edge I said, “Wow, that’s beautiful!” And he said, “I could fix that. I could fix that hole in the ground.”

We took a family vacation with my friend the plumber. We went to Niagara Falls. As we stood below the falls I said, “Wow, that’s beautiful.” And he said, “I could fix that.”

We stand at the foot of the cross, and what do we say? “I could fix that... I could make sure that it never happens again.”

Jesus once showed me that I went into the ministry to make sure that what happened to my Dad, never happened to me. Maybe, I get so worried about what’s good for me that I utterly miss what’s good for nothing, just good. And even worse . . . maybe I try to fix it.

I try to save the savior from saving rather than dropping to my knees and worshipping the Beautiful One.

Well, Judas couldn't see the beauty, only the waste.

Next verse,

Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

Matt. 26:14-16

According to Exodus 21, thirty shekels was the price of a slave.

To Judas, Jesus was a means to an end—like a slave, like a thing, like a prostitute.

And maybe that's why so many women understood Jesus.

They were poor, treated as things, used as concubines, and sold as prostitutes.

In all the Gospels, I can find no bad women related in any way with Jesus.

All good except perhaps Martha, and that was because she was busy with much serving.

She had a cause.

- She was seizing control rather than submitting to grace.
- Seems to me she was acting like a man, a sinful man.
- Acting like a man . . . and to us, she seems least strange.

Well, Judas and bad men wanted to be the Messiah. The strange woman wanted to love the Messiah. To Judas, Jesus was good for something—thirty shekels of silver. To the strange woman, Jesus was just good, and so she dumped a fortune over His head.

Judas worshiped a cause,

And so betrayed the Cause of all things.

Judas worshiped a kingdom,

and so betrayed the King of all kings.

Whenever we worship a cause or a kingdom, we betray the King.

The strange woman didn't worship a cause or a kingdom, she worshiped Jesus.

Even when He appeared to be good for nothing.

Even when He was naked and weak.

Even as He hung on the cross—especially as He hung on the cross.

She loved Him when He appeared to be good for nothing,

And lo and behold, He was good for everything—an entire new world.
The strange woman loved Him when He was vulnerable, exposed, and naked,
And lo and behold, she got pregnant.
She got pregnant with life—eternal life.
She bore eternal fruit, some of which you are.

The strange woman is the Church. She doesn't create the city. She doesn't make Zion.
She is Zion, and she bears Zion. She is the New Jerusalem.

In the Revelation, John sees her coming down out of Heaven from God, as a bride adorned for her husband. As she comes down John exclaims, "She has the very glory of God." The glory of the strange woman is that she sees the glory of God, and thus, reflects the glory of God . . . Jesus. The glory of the strange woman is the glory of the strange man . . . Jesus.

There are all sorts of strange women in the Gospels, and they all have names or titles or occupations except this one woman, whom we meet the night before Christ's passion begins.

She's archetypal. I believe she's a picture of us.

When we worship we surrender the harlot ways of Eve,
And become who it is that we truly are—The glorious Bride of Christ.
The Bride of Christ, who then becomes the mother of Christ—like Mary.
Eve becomes Mary.
We become Mother Church, impregnated with the Life of Christ.
We bear the fruit of Christ—that's Mercy.

When we use the Beautiful One to make ourselves beautiful, we make waste . . .
Unspeakable, epic, and colossal waste,
But when we worship the Beautiful One, we give birth to the beautiful thing...
The Beautiful thing is eternal and indestructible.
And God even uses our waste to birth His Beauty . . .
Even our waste is not wasted—but transformed into beauty.

Well, as I was saying, for nine and a half years I've wanted to scream at the top of my lungs: "What a waste! What the Hell, Jesus? Why the waste?" Sometimes serving Jesus just seems to be an absolutely colossal and even epic waste.

"Why the waste?" For almost ten years, I've asked that of God, for God has made it abundantly clear to me that everything that happened that day happened according to His will and under His sovereign hand.

Almost ten years ago (so I'm hoping the time will help me speak) I stood in front of the leaders of all the churches in my denomination west of the Mississippi—the denomination that my father and I both dearly loved. They had just taken a vote. They

had just read the results. They had overwhelmingly condemned the notion that God might save all, and in the process, they had all defrocked me.

I buried my head in my friend Andrew's chest and began to sob . . . I was horrified that they would make pastors publicly confess faith in God's inability to save and even lack of desire to save—indeed his pleasure in not saving. I was horrified at the loss of all I had worked so hard to create. I was horrified at my inability to sort it all out—I really didn't and still really don't know where I had failed and where I had succeeded. It's like Solomon taught us, I didn't know what was love in me, or what was pride or even hate hiding in me. I was just absolutely horrified at all the waste.

They called me up front to pronounce the sentence. For some reason, I asked if I could pray. I suspect it was partly motivated out of fear of the devil, but at least in part, it was motivated out of love for the Beautiful One.

I can't remember what I prayed, but at one point, I remember praying something like, "Father forgive... all of us."

What happened next, I haven't shared publicly for fear that it would sound self-aggrandizing, and I'm sure that I could, and probably will use it that way. But the thing itself was just the opposite of self-aggrandizing; it was the end of self and the presence of someone else.

I prayed. Then, I sat down next to my wife Susan. She leaned over and said, "Peter, I just saw Jesus." She said, "When you said the word 'forgive'... all at once, I saw you hanging on a cross—and Peter it was bad... and then I saw Jesus. He walked into the room and up to the front where you were hanging. Peter, I watched Him take you down off of that cross. You were really beat up and so I think it will take a long time to heal... but Peter, I watched Jesus take you down from the cross."

Do you see what that means?

For nine and a half years, I've struggled to understand what it means...

I think this is what it means it wasn't a waste, but maybe it was the beautiful thing.

If so, everything was arranged for that moment.

And I was not the author of that moment.

And what will come out of that moment—what is born of that moment—is really not my concern.

It wasn't good for something . . . it was just good.

See?

I think all of your successes, which ultimately are the same thing as all of your failures (maybe we all build a life. . . then lose it), all the works of your flesh, all of your accomplishments and your trials and tribulations—whether you're a prostitute, like the

woman in the Gospel of Luke who anointed Jesus' feet with precious ointment and tears or whether you're an obedient disciple, like Mary of Bethany, who also anointed Jesus' feet with precious ointment and tears—no matter who you are, all of your experiences in this world have been arranged so that at the right moment you would do the beautiful thing . . . and keep doing it for all eternity.

All has been arranged that at the right moment you would worship the Beautiful One, which is doing the beautiful thing. And that at that moment you would give birth to more moments of worship, which are the fruit of the Spirit, and more of the beautiful thing.

And now you may think, "Hey that's a circle! That's circular reasoning."

Worship the Beautiful One,

Which gives birth to the Beautiful Thing,

Which is more worship of the Beautiful One!"

If you think "Hey, that's a circle!" well then, you are absolutely correct. It is eternal. It is eternal life. It is the Kingdom of God and New Jerusalem coming down. And everything outside that circle is waste until it enters the circle that is eternity and the New Jerusalem coming down, whose gates are never shut.

And listen closely: I don't think it matters whether you use a year's wage to buy a pipe organ or feed hungry orphans or dump absurdly expensive perfume on someone's head . . . as long as you are doing whatever it is that you're doing as an act of worship offered to the Beautiful One.

And I don't think it's our concern, as to what is born out of our worship. If a woman worries about getting pregnant, she's much less likely to have children. But if a woman simply adores her bridegroom, well . . . fruit tends to happen.

I think the Sanctuary was born out of that moment nine-and-a-half years ago. And I don't know what has yet to be born out of that moment, and out of our worship. but that's not to be my concern. Jesus said, "Peter, I will build my church."

So I must concern myself with worship.

And you see worship is not really a concern, but the greatest privilege.

Nine-and-a-half years ago, for me, it hurt like hell.

But I'm beginning to see that moment as the greatest event.

And, perhaps, the biggest blessing in all my life.

Whatever the case, I can't create the New Jerusalem.

But I am the New Jerusalem, and through me—through us—Jesus might just create some life.

Jesus is the Superman—the Eschatos Adam.

And the New Jerusalem is His Bride.

Communion

So, on the night He was betrayed—in Old Jerusalem by us—He took bread and broke it saying, “This is my body given to you. Take and eat; do this in remembrance of me.” And in the same manner, He took the cup saying, “This is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins; drink of it all of you, and do this in remembrance of me.”

God doesn't *need* a pipe organ.
God doesn't even *need* you to feed the poor. He can turn stones into bread.
God doesn't *need* you to build the church, His kingdom or the New Jerusalem.
God doesn't *need* you to do anything.
But God *wants* you to worship Him.

He is Love and in *this* is Love. [Peter points to the communion table.]
May you worship and never stop.

Pray

Holy, holy are you Lord. Lord, in seminary I learned that the word “holy” means strange. You are strange—different. We thank you that you are making us strange too. We worship you. Amen.

Benediction

Jesus is the Lamb *and* the Lion.
He is the High Priest and King of Kings.
He is the Word of God that Creates and Conquers all.
He is the Eschatos Adam, which means, “Super Man.”
And we are His Bride.

Years ago, I took the kids to see *Spiderman 2*.
I think God showed me something at the end of the movie.
He showed me who we are—not Peter Parker—but MaryJane.
No one really knows who Spiderman is, but Mary.

Peter Parker warned her of the danger of loving him and so Mary agreed to marry another. Now, Peter Parker sits alone, with the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Spiderman 2 movie

[Mary Jane Watson has just run from her wedding that was supposed to be to another man. As a bride adorned for her groom, she runs to the dingy apartment of Peter Parker in spite of the risk and pain.]

MJ: *I know there will be risks, but I want to face them with you. It's wrong that we should only be half alive, half of ourselves. I love you. So here I am, standing in your doorway. I've always been standing in your doorway. Isn't it about time somebody saved your life? [Long pause...] Well, say something.*

Peter: *Thank you, Mary Jane Watson.*

[Peter and MJ kiss until they hear sirens in the distance.]

MJ: *Go get 'em, tiger.*

Spiderman swings from building to building and shouting with joy as he saves the world.

Jesus isn't a tiger, but He is the lion and we are His bride.³

And as MJ knows, we don't save Him as He saved us, but we do minister to Him as He saves the world.

Only we, the Bride, see Him truly as He is . . .

Not just Spiderman, but Peter Parker,

Not just Superman but Clark Kent,

Not just God Almighty but a baby in a manger and a man on a cross.

It hurts to see Him, but the beauty eclipses the pain and gives birth to life.

We are the strange woman (a biblical word for "strange" is "holy").

And with our worship, we minister to Jesus as He saves the World.

As Jesus hung on the tree in Garden, the fragrance of that Strange Woman's ointment would've lingered in His hair. I wonder what that meant to him then and there? It's Lent, so may you see the Beautiful One and do the beautiful thing.

May you believe the Gospel and worship.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.

³ Ariel is Hebrew for lionness and Jerusalem is called Ariel.