

The Beautiful Thing and How to do it

Matthew 26:1-30

March 12, 2017

Peter Hiatt

All images by Peter Hiatt unless otherwise credited.

Worship Band sings “40” by U2

I waited patiently for the Lord
He inclined and heard my cry
He brought me up out of the pit
Out of the miry clay

I will sing, sing a new song
I will sing, sing a new song

How long to sing this song
How long to sing this song
How long, how long, how long
How long to sing this song

He set my feet upon a rock
And made my footsteps firm
Many will see
Many will see and hear

I will sing, sing a new song
I will sing, sing a new song
I will sing, sing a new song
I will sing, sing a new song

How long to sing this song
How long to sing this song
How long, how long, how long
How long to sing this song

Prayer

“I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined and heard my cry. He lifted me up out of the pit, out of the miry clay...,” writes King David. *“He has put a new song in my mouth, a new song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him”* (from Ps. 40).

Then Bono sings that line Lord: “How long to sing this song?” How long until many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord and join the song? I thank you that they are singing the song in eternity. In the Revelation, John sees *“every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them”* singing a song. Lord, we sing the song and look around, and we think, “How long until everyone else sings it? God, I pray that even though we don’t see others singing we wouldn’t stop singing

your praise, your glory, for you, Lord God, are good. Help us to sing right now in Jesus' name, Amen.

Message

A clip from *The Passion*

[Mournful music plays in the background as Mary embraces and kisses Jesus after He's taken down from the cross.]

This is our second sermon in the season of Lent and our second sermon on Matthew 26.

We ended the message last week with this picture.
We are the harlot, who becomes a bride and then the mother of Jesus, that is, the Church, which is us. We are the strange woman who loves The Lord when He seems to be good for nothing . . . just good, like a baby in a manger or a dead man hanging on a tree or just an "idea."

Maybe Jesus is just an idea to you . . . and yet you love Him.

[Peter begins to sing.]

"The mere idea of you, the longing here for you.

"You'll never know how slow the moments go till I'm near to you."

That's a Billie Holiday song and for Susan and I a romantic favorite.

Well, in Matthew 26:1 Jesus reveals that He will be delivered up to crucifixion. The disciples think it's a waste. They think it's good for nothing.

Then we meet this strange woman that dumps a literal fortune of fragrant oil on the head of our Lord. The disciples declare that the woman's act is a waste—that it's good for nothing. But Jesus declares that it's a *kalos ergon*, a "good work," the "beautiful thing."

Not that it's good for something . . . it's just good. It's beautiful.

Beautiful means good for nothing—just good. Right? Like a sunset.

It doesn't matter how you use it; it's just good.

Matthew records the act as if it's the first "good deed" done by someone other than Jesus in all the Gospel, and perhaps all of Scripture—It's *that* important.

The strange woman loves Jesus when He seems to be

Good for nothing . . . just good.

And she does something that seems to be

Good for nothing . . . and Jesus calls it Good
Maybe she saw that Jesus loved her when she seemed to be
Good for nothing . . . just good—I mean beautiful to Jesus.

Jesus loved her and all humanity when we were good for nothing,
- When we were “dead in our trespasses and sins and the
uncircumcision of our flesh.”
- When we took His life He gave His life.

Jesus loved us when we seemed to be good for nothing.
Jesus even loved His Father, when His Father seemed to be good for nothing.

He cried out, “Why have you forsaken me?”
He thought God had forsaken Him. Isn’t God like that, “good for nothing?”
To Jesus, His Father seemed to be good for nothing—just good, beautiful.
And so He surrenders to that great Beauty crying, *“Into your hands, I
commit my Spirit.”*

Jesus the Son, loved God, when God the Father, seemed to be good for
nothing. And God the Father, loved Jesus when Jesus seemed to be good for
nothing—when, in the words of St. Paul, *“He who knew no sin, became sin.”*
It was then, that God exalted Him above every name that is named.

Words are failing me here, but there is a moment when God the Father and
God the Son both seem to be good for nothing . . . just Good.
- A moment when they don’t love for a reason, but love is the reason.
- A moment when neither is using the other, but only loving the other.
- A moment when they are good for nothing . . . just Good. That’s beautiful.
- A moment that reveals God is good for no reason. He is the reason.
- A moment that reveals God is One—two persons (or three persons), but
one substance. God is Love—Love that will not stop and cannot be stopped.
God is the Beautiful One.
And the strange woman does the beautiful thing.
And I shared a moment in my life when I think I may have done the beautiful
thing too—a moment I hadn’t ever shared publicly. It was a moment when God
seemed to be good for nothing . . . because He didn’t seem to work for me—
my psyche and my world were being destroyed.

And it was a moment when I seemed to be good for nothing to God because I
was being defrocked and kicked out of the ministry.
- It was in that moment that I asked permission to pray, and I prayed “Father
forgive...us all.”
- And in that moment that my wife had a vision of me crucified.
- And in that moment that she also had a vision of Jesus taking me down from
that cross.

That moment was the worst moment of my life and, I think, maybe . . . the best. I think maybe it was, and will forever be, the beautiful thing. Last week, we said that everything is arranged that you and I would do the beautiful thing and never stop.

Well, that's a summary of last week's message and the view from 40,000 ft. And I know it's more than any of us can comprehend so let's go back and look at the text and chew on these three questions. And even if we don't comprehend, perhaps we will be comprehended.

These are the three questions:

1. What exactly is "the beautiful thing?"
2. Why did Jesus like it so much? AND
3. How can we do the beautiful thing?

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."

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, 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? 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 thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her" (*Or as a memorial from her*).

Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot,

That's just the name Judah. He's representative of a whole nation, actually a whole ideal, actually human religion.

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.

The price of a slave.

And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

Matthew 26:1-16

Well, it's very clear that the ugly thing is buying and selling Jesus for thirty pieces of silver . . . and the beautiful thing is this:

[Image of anointing prayer oils]

This is an alabaster flask and anointing oil to equip you for the work of the ministry. We'll be selling these Sanctuary Denver "beautiful thing kits" at the information center after the service. The price is dependent on your income. Mark tells us that this ointment was worth three hundred denari, which is a year's fair wage. So if your annual income is \$50,000, that's the price of the oil.

The woman in our story is unnamed but John records that faithful Mary of Bethany did this same sort of thing. And Luke records that a prostitute did this same sort of thing too.

So this is our respectable church lady edition.

[Image of anointing prayer oils repeated]

And this is our prostitute edition.

[Image of a clay container with a string probably used to carry oil or perfume]

A prostitute would wear this around her neck and use it for plying her trade.

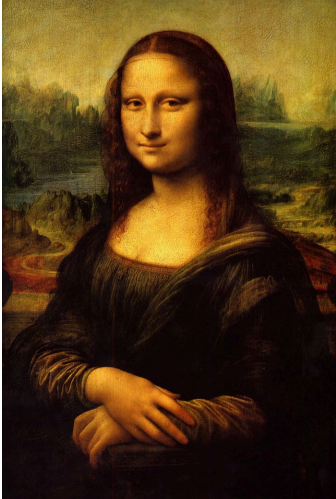
You purchase the one that feels most appropriate to you . . . and either one will work, just the same, but it's about more than just oil isn't it?

You have to dump it on Jesus' head.

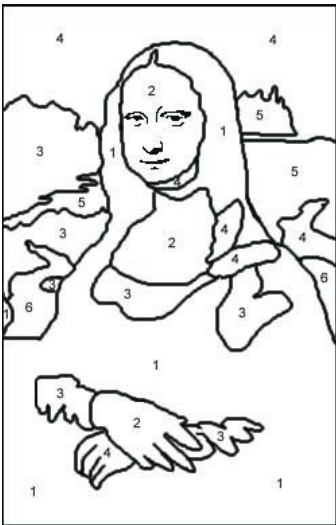
- *So the oil comes with an instruction book on "how to find Jesus."*
Jesus said, "Whatever you do to the last and least of these... you do to me."
- *So the instruction book contains a list that will help you identify, "the last and least of these."*
- *So for instance: You could walk the 16th street mall and judge everyone you meet. After you identify "the last and least of these," you simply run up and dump the perfumed oil on their head... and there you have it: "The beautiful thing!"*

Isn't that beautiful?

Well no—that's not the beautiful thing; that's the ugly thing, and yet we'd like it to be the beautiful thing. That's religion.



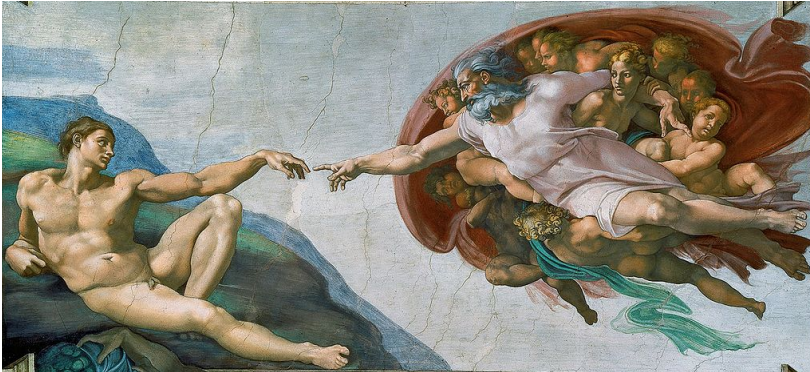
This is a beautiful thing—Leonardo Da Vinci’s “Mona Lisa.” And we’d like to think that we could do this beautiful thing by purchasing one of these:



A paint by numbers Mona Lisa kit.

We tend to think that a good person is a person that paints within the lines. And if a person is a really good person then they have just identified more numbers and lines.

Now, paint by numbers might help you learn to paint—mostly by helping you realize that you don’t know how to paint—but it’s not really painting. When my kids were little they did some painting by numbers. And I’ve kept some of their art work, but none of it is paint by numbers.



Here's a beautiful thing. It's Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam."

And here's a paint by numbers creation of Adam.

[Image of Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam" where God is holding a paintbrush in his outstretched hand and Adam is blank canvas with numbered regions.]

And look: God is painting by numbers . . . to create Adam.

Is that how God creates, Adam?

Is that how God creates anything?

Someone tells Him what is good and then He tries to be good?

He tries to paint within their lines according to their numbers?

When you complain that God isn't good, isn't that what you're saying to God?

"God you're not painting within the numbers and the lines I've given you!"

Painting by numbers . . .

Is that how God creates a beautiful thing?

Well obviously. the beautiful thing is not simply dumping oil on someone's head. So back to our question: What exactly is the beautiful thing?

We just read about it, How would you describe it?

Just think about it. Fill in the blank. _____

Hopefully, I've anticipated most of those, but this is my list:

#1

The Beautiful Thing:

- 1. She gave what she had.*

This is the artwork that sits on the shelf next to my desk.



My daughter Elizabeth drew it for me when she was about six. She gave me what she had. And I find it absolutely beautiful: Daddy and Elizabeth.

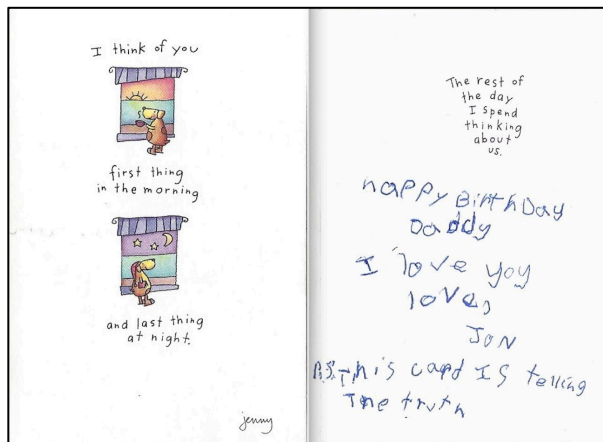
This is the beautiful picture that's been hanging on my office door for the last sixteen years.



Coleman drew it for me when he was about 5.

*An art critic would call it a trash and maybe a waste of paper.
And I'd punch him in the nose and say, "It's the beautiful thing."*

*This is my favorite piece of literature.
I keep it in the bottom right hand drawer of my desk.*



*It's a card that Jonathan gave to me about twenty years ago:
I think of you first thing in the morning and last thing at night...
The rest of the day I spend thinking about us,
Happy Birthday Daddy. I love you. Love, Jon."
And now the poetry: "PS This card is telling the truth."*

This is a priceless piece of pottery that's sat in this spot on my office shelf for the last fifteen years or so.



My daughter Becky made this and gave it to me... when she was about nine.

If she gave this to me today, I'd look deep into her eyes and say, "Becky . . . what is this crap? You got way better than this, I've seen your artwork. You are an amazing artist and you give me this? Maybe when you're nine but at twenty-five . . . I don't think so."

*You may have great talents—if so, give God those talents.
You may have meager talents—if so, give Him those talents.
He loves them both the same—if you just give Him what you got.*

*You may have millions of dollars—give Him what you've got.
Perhaps, you only have a widow's mite—give Him what you've got.
Your Father in Heaven doesn't really care what you've got.
He's already got everything.*

He doesn't care what you've got, but He would literally die for you—in the hope that you might give Him what you've got, which is what He's already given.

Along about 1968, I took an art class. I think it was after school so I think my Dad paid for the class and all the ingredients in the class. Well, one day we made ashtrays—it was the 1960's. We made them by coloring plastic tiles and melting them around a coffee cup.

I remember working so hard on mine. I made one side paisley . . .



And on the other I drew signs.



*They read, "Stop," "To Dad," "Bye," "Hi," "Hello." Like I said—it was the 60's.
I was so excited to give it to my Dad...
It didn't even occur to me that He didn't smoke.
And even better, I don't think it occurred to him.*

This ashtray sat on the corner of his dresser from 1968 until March 8th, 2004.

Two weeks ago, Karl shared how he saved his allowance for two months and bought his stepdad a cheap little bottle of aftershave, and how his stepdad didn't even seem to notice.

*Well, this is the Gospel truth: God is Karl's true Dad. And I believe God has a dresser, and on the dresser there is a bottle of priceless cheap cologne, which He received from his son, Karl, almost fifty years ago.
The Father loves to wear it; to Him, it is the most fragrant of offerings.*

See? Even bad dads—especially bad dads—help us long for our Father in Heaven.

So give what you have!

Maybe you're like Mary of Bethany, the faithful disciple in John 12. Or maybe you're like the prostitute, in Luke 7, who had used her perfumed oil to cover the smell of prostitution. She wore that ointment as if she were wearing shame. She wore it as shame.

Well, give either, in fact, you can always give both—the burnt offering and the sin offering, good deeds, and the confession. They are both fragrant offerings—the fragrant offering—treasured by God.

She gave what she had...

And you can always give what you have...

That means you can always do the beautiful thing.

It's not something you must wait for or that you can earn.

It's always now.

Eternity touches time right now.

*Well Anyway,
#2*

The Beautiful Thing:

- 1. She gave what she had.*
- 2. She gave all she had.*

She didn't carefully pour out ten percent of the ointment and ask:

"Is that sufficient Lord?"

"And is it ten percent before or after taxes?"

She gave all she had, so in some way it must've been painful. For someone like Mary of Bethany in John 12, three-hundred denari, might very well have been all her disposable income.

#3

The Beautiful Thing:

1. She gave what she had.
2. She gave all she had.
3. It was painful.

For someone like the prostitute in Luke 7. The perfumed oil would've been all her shame, and all her pride, and all her self-reliance.

#4

The Beautiful Thing:

1. She gave what she had.
2. She gave all she had.
3. It was painful.
4. It was absolute joy.

It was painful, but it appears that all the pain was utterly eclipsed by joy.

There is this great line in the Lord of the Rings. After Frodo casts the ring of power into Mt. Doom, describing the ensuing celebration, Tolkien writes, "They went out to regions where pain and delight flow together and tears are the very wine of blessedness."

I think it's what a woman experiences when she gives birth, and the sorrow is transformed into joy. I think it's even what I've tasted in communion, in the sanctuary of my covenant with my bride, and even in my covenant with Jesus—in moments in worship, in which I've been lost and found all at once.

It was painful and joyful.

#5

The Beautiful Thing:

1. She gave what she had.
2. She gave all she had.
3. It was painful.
4. It was absolute joy.
5. It was sacrificial.

The King was anointed, the High Priest was anointed, and one other thing was anointed... In Exodus 30, Moses is commanded to make a strange and costly fragrant oil, in order to anoint the tabernacle, which would become the temple.

He was to anoint the tabernacle and all that's in it, including the altar of sacrifice. He's even commanded to make a special incense. So when the priest would offer the lamb for sacrifice, the fragrance would fill the whole house of the Lord. John records that when Mary anointed Jesus' feet, the house was filled with fragrance. See? That's a very meaning statement in the Gospels.

The strange woman's worship is fragrance and it's fragrant.
Fragrance infects everything with beauty.

In Ephesians 5:2 Paul writes,
“*Christ... gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*”
And he also writes that in the same way, we are to “walk in love” as He loved us.

#6

The Beautiful Thing:

1. She gave what she had.
2. She gave all she had.
3. It was painful.
4. It was absolute joy.
5. It was sacrificial.
6. She gave un-self-consciously.

As if her *self* was being sacrificed on that fragrant altar.

Have you ever been so excited about giving that you forgot yourself?

The day I bought Susan's engagement ring was like that for me.
I wanted to spend more, and I spent all I had—all my student loan money.

When David worshiped before the Ark of the Covenant it was like that.
He lost track of himself and even most of his clothes, as he danced before the Ark in his underwear.

When Solomon dedicated the temple it was like that:
They offered 22,000 bulls and 122,000 sheep that day.

There would have been a literal river of wine, fragrant ointments, and blood that flowed from the temple, flooding the Valley of Gehenna and eventually pooling in the Dead Sea—the sea of Arabah, the sea of waste.

That river would flow every Passover, including that day after the strange woman anointed Jesus.

Every Jew would bring his Passover lamb to the temple to be ritually slaughtered. That's thousands upon thousands of lambs. The river of lamb's blood would flow from a temple of stone like a river. And the river would flow from a temple of flesh, sacrificed on an altar that was a tree in a garden—the altar that we refer to as the cross.

To Julian of Norwich, in her famous vision, it's reported that Jesus said, "To have ever suffered the Passion for you is for me a great joy, a bliss, an endless delight; and if I could suffer more I would do so."

#7

The Beautiful Thing:

1. She gave what she had.
2. She gave all she had.
3. It was painful.
4. It was absolute joy.
5. It was sacrificial.
6. She gave un-self-consciously.
7. She gave naturally.

I mean she gave as if giving were her nature.

Judas judged the gift.

Judas was seeking knowledge of good and evil, and so Judas judged the gift.
Judas was trying to be good.

She was not trying to be good.

She just *was* Good—as if it were already her nature.

#8

The Beautiful Thing:

1. She gave what she had.
2. She gave all she had.
3. It was painful.
4. It was absolute joy.
5. It was sacrificial.
6. She gave un-self-consciously.
7. She gave naturally.
8. She gave personally.

She gave to a person. Judas wanted to give to “the poor.”

Jesus said, “*The poor you have with you always, but you do not always have me...*” And yet in a few chapters, He will say, “*Lo... I am with you always.*” Maybe He always has us, but we don’t always have Him. We always have “the poor,” and can give to “the poor” like Judas. But it’s something else to give to Jesus in the poor as if the poor were His very body.

For Judas, the poor were a problem to be fixed.
For the woman, the poor were a Person to be loved.

Judas would give to “the poor.”
The strange woman gave to “a Person”
... in a temple of broken body and shed blood.

“Welfare is for a purpose,” mother Teresa used to say,
“Christian Love is for a person.”

The Strange woman gives to a Person... And she gives her person.

A person is an earthen vessel containing the breath of God.
A person is just like an alabaster jar containing priceless fragrant oil.

“The alabaster box must be broken,” writes Watchman Nee “... If the alabaster box is not broken, the pure spikenard will not flow forth. Strange to say, many are still treasuring the alabaster box thinking its treasure exceeds that of the ointment.”

On the tree, in the Garden, Christ’s body is broken and blood spills out—the Life is in the blood, for the spirit—the breath—is in the blood

At Simon the leper's house, Mark points out that she breaks the flask. The strange woman breaks the earthen vessel and the fragrant oil spills out.

Paul writes, "*He who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her... But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one Spirit with Him*" (1 Cor. 6:16-17).

#9

The Beautiful Thing:

1. She gave what she had.
2. She gave all she had.
3. It was painful.
4. It was absolute joy.
5. It was sacrificial.
6. She gave un-self-consciously.
7. She gave naturally.
8. She gave personally.
9. It is ecstasy.

"Ecstasy" comes from the Greek word *ecstasis*, meaning out of stasis—out of normal and lost in wonder, as in a trance.

The strange woman is in ecstasy; it's not a waste, but she is wasted.
She's not drunk with wine, but she's filled with the Spirit.
She's losing herself and finding herself.
She's pouring out the Spirit and being filled *with* the Spirit all at once.

The Beautiful thing is sacrifice and ecstasy.
I think that's what the mystics are trying to tell us.
Mystics like Julian of Norwich and Saint Francis of Assisi.

Saint Francis said, "Blessed is he that expecteth nothing"—as if God were good for nothing. "Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall enjoy everything."

I suppose that St. Francis began to see that everything is, and always was, absolute gift. So, when God gives and even when He takes, it's all a gift, for God keeps your every sacrifice like a treasure placed upon his dresser.

Francis sacrificed all and gained God and then all things with Him.

In his biography of Saint Francis, G. K. Chesterton writes: "It is rather like the reversal whereby a lover might say at first sight that a lady looked like a flower, and say afterward that all flowers reminded him of his lady."

[Peter begins to sing.]

“I see your face in every flower, your eyes in stars above...”

“The very thought of you, the mere idea of you, my love.”

Do you realize that Jesus is the idea of God behind every flower?

And the idea of God expressed in every flower . . . beauty.

Perhaps if we learned to love Him, when He seemed to be good for nothing, we would see that He’s the Good in everything and everything is telling us, “I AM Good for you.”

“So arises out of this almost nihilistic abyss the noble thing... called praise,” writes Chesterton. Then continues:

[Francis] desired even in his death agony to lie bare upon the ground, to prove that he had, and that he was, nothing. And we can say, with almost as deep a certainty, that the stars which passed above that gaunt and wasted corpse stark upon the rocky floor had for once, in all their shining cycles round the the world of labouring humanity, looked down upon a happy man.

So, happy are you when wasted, when you know that you are good for nothing . . . just good in the eyes of God—who thinks you’re beautiful.

You know: He loved you and created you when you were actually nothing. The illusion that you could create yourself and thereby earn His love is absurd. To finally see that, is to lose yourself and find yourself, in ecstasy.

A little child loves His Father when His Father constantly works for Him, and so the thought of earning his love never enters the child’s mind, and so all the child’s artwork is beautiful.

An old saint loves His Father in Heaven when His Father in Heaven does not seem to work for Him, and he can no longer work for His Father, but they each love the other, for they are beautiful.

In the 2nd century AD, Rabi Akiva was tortured to death at the hands of Romans for teaching the Scripture. It is said that he was Jubilant as the Romans burned his flesh with hot irons. The Roman Governor Rufus asked him if he was a sorcerer since he seemed to feel no pain. “I am no sorcerer” replied Rabbi Akiva, “but I rejoice at the opportunity now given me to love God with ‘all my life.’”

Before that moment he could love God, *for* his life

But in that moment he could love God with all His life,

When God was no longer good for something . . . (like giving him life)

But just Good, Beautiful.

I think that's what I was trying to say last week, when I described my trial before the Presbytery of my denomination.

And the moment they judged me and took my life away,
The moment I prayed, "Father forgive us all,"
The moment Susan saw me crucified,
And the moment she saw Jesus came and took me down.

I have seen that as the worst day of my life—a terrible unconscionable waste. And yet, I'm beginning to see that it's always been an invitation to ecstasy—that is . . . the beautiful thing.

All your suffering is an invitation to ecstasy—an opportunity to love God when He seems to be good for nothing, just Good.

It's said that Rabi Akiva died reciting the *Shema*—that's Deuteronomy 6:4 "*Hear Oh Israel: The Lord is One. And you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength.*" It's said that he died with the word "One" on His lips.

God is One. He is pure Love.

And in that moment, perhaps Rabi Akiva's Love, was pure.

"Purity of heart is to will one thing," wrote Kierkegaard.

Mark points out that the strange woman's ointment was pure.

#10

The Beautiful Thing:

1. She gave what she had.
2. She gave all she had.
3. It was painful.
4. It was absolute joy.
5. It was sacrificial.
6. She gave un-self-consciously.
7. She gave naturally.
8. She gave personally.
9. It is ecstasy.
10. It is pure.

In other words, it is free.

#11

The Beautiful Thing:

1. She gave what she had.
2. She gave all she had.
3. It was painful.
4. It was absolute joy.
5. It was sacrificial.
6. She gave un-self-consciously.
7. She gave naturally.
8. She gave personally.
9. It is ecstasy.
10. It is pure.
11. It is free.

[Peter begins singing.]

“I’m proud to be an American where at least I know I’m free...”

It’s very good to be grateful for soldiers that fight for freedom . . .

But do we even have a clue, as to what freedom is?

In America, we tend to think freedom never having to suffer one of these:

[Image of Jesus on the cross]

In Scripture, freedom can only happen if you pick up one of these.

Most Americans believe that freedom is an inalienable right. Freedom to choose Coke or Pepsi, a Whopper *with* cheese or *without* cheese! They believe that we’re born free. And in one sense we are born free, but not free to choose the Good, for we don’t know what it is.

So most folks would say, “OK, well, we’re free once we gain ‘the knowledge of good and evil,’ and therefore, can choose the Good or the evil.”

Soren Kierkegaard wrote that a focus on “freedom of choice, as such, means the sure loss of freedom.”

And I think we know intuitively what he means:

[Image of a sheet of music]

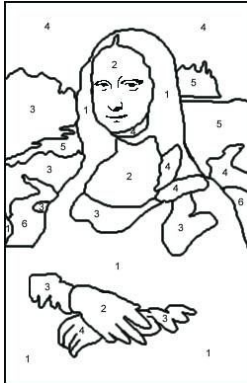
As long as a singer is reading a score and constantly deliberating over every note he sings—he is not free to actually sing or really singing.

[Image of chart with dance steps]

As long as a dancer is conscious of every step—she is not free to actually dance and not really dancing.

[Image of a huge bookshelf]

As long as you justify yourself, with your knowledge of good and evil—as long as you try to be good, you're not free to actually be good.



As long as you paint by numbers—you are not beautiful.

The Strange Woman was *not* painting by numbers.
She was *not* constrained by law. No one told her that it was good to dump that oil on Jesus' head. No!
She was beginning to dance to a tune that only she and Jesus could hear.
She was beginning to sing a song that is ancient and yet forever new.

She willed one thing.
She wasn't divided, wondering, "Should I anoint or not anoint?" "What is the good and what is the evil?"

We think we're free, once we can judge the Good and the evil.
But "the Good" is God's Will, God's Word, God's Judgment.
We think we're free, once we can judge God's Judgment.
But according to the Gospel, we can only be free
 Once God's Judgment has judged us.
 Once God's Judgment has broken
Our earthen vessel, our alabaster flask, our arrogance, pride,
false self and old man. . .
 That thing that's constantly calculating, bargaining, justifying,
 striving, worrying and manipulating . . .
 That thing that's constantly asking, "Should I choose A or B?"
 "And if I choose A what will happen? And if I choose B what
 won't happen?"

"If I choose A, what will God do to me? And if I choose B,
what will God give me?"
That thing that does not love, but constantly judges Love.

If you're proud to be free, you're not free—but a slave to pride and the devil's
most subtle deception.

Freedom is not judging Love. Freedom is being judged *by* Love.
Judged by love, conquered by Love, and constrained only by Love.

The Beautiful thing is to be One as God is One.
The Beautiful thing is to Love in absolute Freedom.

So, How do I do the beautiful thing?
If I make myself love, aren't I just painting by numbers?

Matthew 26:17-30

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.' " And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been [kalos: beautiful] for that man [which could refer to Judas or Jesus] if he had not been born." [What Judas will do is the opposite of the beautiful thing.] "Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so." [He had already said, "It is a waste."]

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

The Hymn that the Jews would sing at the end of the Passover feast, is the Hallel—that's Psalm 113 through 118. It ends with this line—the most repeated line in all of Scripture:

"Oh give thanks to the LORD (Yahweh), for he is good; for his steadfast Love endures forever" "hesed olam"

It means: His Love is eternal, absolute, pure, undivided, without limit, and therefore, free.

Our Judgment was to crucify Love, and Love's Judgment was to keep loving. That's God's Judgment—to be Himself—always; He is Love.

When we see it, we'll sing that old song in countless new ways.
And we don't only see it, we ingest it.

God is saying, "Do your worst and I will reveal my best—I will remain Love."

"And this is how much I love you: my Body broken and my blood shed."

"Get the picture? Now eat it and then, paint it."

"Children consume my Love and paint me a picture."

And then, God hands you one of these: [Peter holds up a blank canvas]

It terrifies us... because there are no lines.
It's called Freedom.



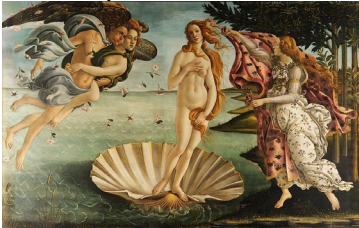
"For freedom Christ has set us free," Writes Paul.

"Stand fast and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

You know, there are an infinite number of ways to paint a blank canvas



... and paint that canvas, so that none of the paintings are ugly.



... but none of those paintings will be paint by number.



... none will be constrained by lines and numbers and law.



... but ALL will be constrained by beauty.

Robert Benson writes,

On the wall of one of the cathedral bays at Saint John's cathedral, . . . there is an inscription carved into the stone, . . . "Thy will be done in art

as it is in heaven.” Amen, I say. And in plumbing and paper pushing and publishing as well. And in teaching and board-membling and doctoring and bricklaying, for that matter. Or in whatever else it turns out is the work that you and I are given to do by the One who is looking forward to seeing our ‘stone’ in the long-awaited Cathedral.”

The Cathedral is a temple, and we are the living stones.

So How do we do the beautiful thing?

Well at the table of the Lord, we not only see the Judgment of God, and we not only ingest the Judgment of God, we are impregnated with the Judgment of God—the Promised Seed.

Jesus is the Judgment of God in flesh and we are His temple of flesh—His Bride. We give birth to the beautiful thing and the beautiful thing is us.

#12

The Beautiful Thing:

1. She gave what she had.
2. She gave all she had.
3. It was painful.
4. It was absolute joy.
5. It was sacrificial.
6. She gave un-self-consciously.
7. She gave naturally.
8. She gave personally.
9. It is ecstasy.
10. It is pure.
11. It is free.
12. It is who you truly are.

My father died thirteen years ago last Wednesday. Late that night, my mother said, “Peter is there anything you want?” Immediately, I said “Yes, just one thing.” I went to the dresser and there it was . . .



Just where it had been for thirty-five years—our ashtray.

It may be my greatest treasure, for I gave it to my father,
And he treasured it as his greatest treasure.
So what I gave is my greatest possession.

Jesus said that we can store up treasure in Heaven.
We do it by worshipping our Lord in the temples that are all around us.
And we do it by worshipping Him right here and right now.

Communion

God does not paint by numbers.
He creates all things with this. [Peter points to the communion table.]
Commune with the Beautiful One and you'll do the beautiful thing.

[The bread and wine are distributed and several worship songs are sung.]

Benediction

Close your eyes.
The Strange Woman worshiped Jesus when He seemed to be good for nothing, just good. She went to the tomb when He seemed to be good for nothing, just good. Sometimes Jesus seems to be good for nothing . . . just Good.

Sometimes, in my life, God seems good for nothing. He disappoints me. He doesn't do what I ask when I ask, and where I want Him to. I suffer. And yet, at least a part of me still loves Him.

I'm the strange woman. You're the strange woman. The Church is the strange woman. We love the Creator when He seems to be good for nothing—just Good. We worship Jesus when He seems to be good for nothing, just Good—Beautiful. So we sing to Him.

But did you know that He also sings over us, when we seem to be good for nothing? Scripture says, even when you seem to be good for nothing, He sings over you. See? He knows who you truly are. He admires His own artwork.

So for a moment, stop singing, and let Him sing to you. Listen to Jesus singing to you through these words.

You are beautiful beyond description
Too marvelous for words
Too wonderful for comprehension
Like nothing ever seen or heard
I am your infinite wisdom
I am the depth of your love
You are beautiful beyond description
Majesty enthroned above

And I stand, I stand in awe of you
I stand, I stand in awe of you
Holy Bride to whom all grace is due
I stand in awe of you

Holy Bride to whom all grace is due
I stand in awe of you

Now sing it back to Him.

You are beautiful beyond description
Too marvelous for words
Too wonderful for comprehension
Like nothing ever seen or heard
Who can grasp your infinite wisdom
Who can fathom the depth of your love
You are beautiful beyond description
Majesty enthroned above

And I stand, I stand in awe of you
I stand, I stand in awe of you

Holy God to whom all praise is due
I stand in awe of you

Holy God to whom all praise is due
I stand in awe of you

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." —Revelation 21:1-5

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.