

Lenten Midweek 5 – 2026

The Crucifixion of Christ in the Life of Man

(The Crucifixion and the Essence of Beauty)

Genesis 1:26-31

Isaiah 53:1-12

What does a crawfish know about ballet? What does a jackal know about Tchaikovsky? The cliché is that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Is it true? Does beauty have a source? Personal taste is subjective. Does personal taste really rule the realm of beauty? Is beauty entirely hostage to the individual? Is a black velvet Elvis beautiful in the same way that the Sistine Chapel is beautiful?

We're all familiar with snobs. We're all familiar with know-it-alls, elitist bullies who look down on common people because they supposedly have a discerning eye and us knuckle-draggers will occasionally eat a quarter-pounder. We want no part of snobbery. But compare the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. with the J. Edgar Hoover Building – one is beautiful architecture and one is the ugliest building in the city. During the Medieval Era, beauty was a prominent consideration in churchly architecture. Now, our churches are designed like movie theaters or concert venues or shopping malls. Have we lost track of something? The more secular we become, the less beautiful our culture becomes. Do you believe that?

Beauty pulls at us. Beauty pulls at the spirit and elevates the heart. In chapel, at the beginning of the school year, we focus on creation – Adam and Eve specifically. The children are intuitive and a joy to teach. Was Eve smart? Oh, yes, Pastor! Was she strong, was she beautiful? Who made her beautiful? *What* made her beautiful? All this is to hammer home the most important attribute of Adam and Eve. What was the best thing about Eve? She was holy. Was Eve's character beautiful? Was she regal *because* of her character? How readily can you identify beauty in a human? At nearly sixty-three years of age, I am just now reading Uncle Tom's Cabin, an American classic. Tom is a slave in the early 1850's. It is a work of fiction, but it has all the hallmarks of reality. Tom is heroic. Tom is beautiful. Tom's character is objectively beautiful because he drinks deeply from the font of beauty, the Holy Scriptures. Beauty is a divine creation. Man is capable of discerning and appreciating beauty because God crafted that ability into our constitution for a reason. Beauty has a source. God wants you to find it.

Tom endures great suffering and yet he refuses to act contrary to his faith. Compassion and integrity – Tom reflects Christ. Who is the Author of the beauty in our character? Who is the Author of sacrificial love? Who is the Author of fortitude and trust and honesty? From whence does virtue flow? Eve was beautiful and she reached out her hand and took some of the fruit which she was told not to eat. Beauty, it turns out, is fleeting. Sin was wrecking ball. Sin is a demonic Joker who does violence to classic art to suit his own demented view of beauty. Sin makes us Quasimodo without the sacrificial, humble heart. Sin makes us twisted and backward and dark where light should be. God sees. God knows the difference between what is beautiful and what is hideous. Love is beautiful. Love shares. Love intervenes. Without counting the

cost, love intervenes to restore what was lost. You have been taken from being hideous to being beautiful. What would it take?

Today is a beautiful day. Nine months from today we will celebrate the birth of Christ. Before there can be a birth there must be a conception. Today is The Annunciation of our Lord (March 25th). Today, the Angel Gabriel came to a no-account virgin young lass. Today, the power of the Most High overshadowed Mary and she conceived. Genuine beauty, objective beauty invaded our broken creation. The Incarnation, God being made man, today is the day. Where there was the ugliness of greed, the Lord Christ brought the beauty of self-giving, the beauty of divine generosity. It is objective. It is discoverable. Beauty pulls at us and elevates our soul above the poor architecture of sinful man. Where there was the ugliness of pride, Jesus embodied a humility that puts others' needs above one's own. It was inherent to Him, a natural expression of genuine beauty, a beauty that was more than superficial, more than skin-deep. His birth was beautiful. In a humble locale, God came to us and the angels sang. He came to bear what is objectively hideous. And He became hideous.

We say that God hides His glory beneath shame. It is the theology of the cross, a Lutheran distinctive. God hides His power beneath weakness. God hides beauty beneath that which naturally repulses the human eye. People turned away from Him. As Jesus was crucified, they couldn't look. The words from the prophet Isaiah, written 700 years before Christ, capture the wonder of God laying aside His divine prerogatives. "... he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2). We have a line in one of our hymns that explicates this bit from Isaiah: "Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see" (Holy, Holy, Holy – LSB 507, st. 3). In His wisdom, God saves us by faith, not by sight. He opens the eyes of our hearts. He reveals to us the apex of beauty. Jesus' body is mangled, twisted with our sin as He is crucified. That is the apex of beauty. Love is poured out in abundance, love which enlivens your heart. It is our sin that He bears. Patiently, with devotion to His Father and fidelity toward you, He is smothered in ugliness and the hideousness of our sin is apparent in His suffering. That's what men hid their faces from – the horror of our sin being punished (Isaiah 53:3).

You see our Lord on His cross as beautiful, for that is what it is – that is what is there to be seen, hidden beneath His suffering. Forgiveness becomes visible and it is beautiful. Man is recreated in His image. He has made you beautiful. In your Father's eyes, as He looks upon you through the rosy-red lens of His Son's blood, you are beautiful, without spot, or blemish or defect (Ephesians 5:25-27). As you manifest Jesus' virtue in your life, others see Christ, others see His beauty *in* you, and they are elevated above the secular quagmire that is all around us. Beauty has a source. It is multifaceted but it is anchored in a crucified Messiah. Beauty pulls at us. Sometimes we can't look at Him, suffering there, but not because it's horrendous but because His beauty is so extreme it rips at our heart. "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). You have known that beauty. You are going to go on knowing it as you drink from the font of the Scriptures. Someday you will see it with your eyes.

Now, in this age, look for it. In your wife, in your husband, in your brothers and sisters in Christ, look for it. Listen for it in the Gospel. See it in the sacrament celebrated among believers who need His provision. Rejoice in the beauty which God reveals. Ballet and Tchaikovsky and Michaelangelo – great art elevates the soul. But art finds its true source in Christ and His Word, Christ and His cross, Christ and His virtue.