

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – 2026
Deuteronomy 7:6-9
Romans 8:28-39
Matthew 13:44-52

You're not that attractive. It has nothing to do with the cut of your jib, nothing to do with the height of your cheekbones, or the symmetry of your mug; it has nothing to do with the shape of your nose or your curvy proportions. Heidi Klum and Brad Pitt aren't that attractive either. So, this is not a cosmetic beatdown but a dispassionate, sober, objective examination of your inherent beauty (or, more accurately, the lack thereof). You're not that attractive. Don't kill the messenger. I'm just as homely and bedraggled as any other. About us, the old saying is accurate: beauty is skin deep but ugly goes all the way to the bone.

A set of parables is put before you today. And to take all the suspense out of the preaching, I'm going to tell you right here at the beginning how to interpret them. You are the treasure hidden in the field. You are the pearl of great price. But why anyone would want you is beyond me. You are a horrendous sight, one from whom any discerning eye would quickly turn in revulsion. In my experience, all sinners abhor the thought of one tragic scenario. In a group setting, among friends and foes alike, among neighbors and colleagues, to have the catalogue of your sins read aloud by the Just Judge. Naked and alone, there would be no hole to crawl in, no "Calgon, take me away" reprieve, no ejection seat handle to pull – just you and the evidence of your putridity.

The Just Judge starts with pride. The catalogue always starts with pride. The foul expressions of pride in your life have been innumerable. Pride has sired an unholy brood of equally damning sins because pride is both a blinding and a reproductive fault. So worthy are you in your own mind that you elevate yourself above others with astonishing regularity – and you don't even know it. In your heart of hearts, you love yourself with unbounded devotion. I saw a four-year-old young lad (no relation to me) kick a teenager with such ferocity, with radical disdain and hatred, his face was alive with death-dealing pride. And I saw myself. Pride, wretched arrogance, has led me to hurt others. Pride has led you to exalt yourself to the harm of your brother, your sister, to the harm of those who are weaker in the faith, to the harm of those who have seen the manifestations of your pride and know the Name that you bear. When I say that you're not that attractive I am being diplomatic, gentle, for the sin that clings to you, the corrupt nature that defiles you has done its work with grim efficiency.

And yet, despite all that... you have a Suitor.

The story is told of a Polynesian trader who had come to a tropical island to bargain for a wife. He is well known as a shrewd but honest and well-liked fellow (amiable, kind). On this island, the currency for such transactions, and they *were* transactions, was cows. A gentleman suitor would barter with a girl's father by offering him a number of cows, supposedly commensurate with the girl's beauty and her disposition. The father would either accept the offer and give his daughter's hand or hold out for a more handsome offer. Our shrewd trader takes a fancy to a young lass who is considered by her neighbors, and even her own father, to be of little value – she is sullen and ugly and undesirable.

As the bargaining begins, the other women brag to each other of how many cows their husbands had given for them (the most radiant among them had commanded the eye-popping sum of five cows). These womenfolk wag their tongues as to the foregone conclusion, that this girl's father would be fortunate if he received even one cow. As a bluff, hoping to get just one cow, the father asks for three as a first bid. Everyone laughs at the audacity, waiting for our trader to make a devastating counteroffer. In simple language, the trader responds, saying: "three cows are many... but not nearly enough." He then offers the unheard-of price of *eight cows* for her hand in marriage. Jaws drop. Silence erupts. The bride's eyes become saucers. That night, when the trader makes good on his offer, he suffers no small amount of derision for a deal that all believe to be foolish. Our trader then takes his bride and leaves the island for a trading trip.

Jesus tells His parable about the pearl of great price and about the treasure hidden in a field, and they are, at their core, love stories, stories of great love. You are the treasure. You are the pearl. In your lost condition, with nothing but filthy rags as clothing, with the sullen mark of pride on your face, you have a Suitor. You have a divine Suitor. In His joy, Christ emptied Himself of all that He had to lay claim to you (Hebrews 12:2). To purchase you, the Incarnate Son of God bled and died. Love, the God who is love, gave His life for you. To redeem you from death, from lostness, from pride and hell and the prison of self, your divine Suitor allowed all evil to attack and invade His holy person. Christ became sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). All death was heaped on Him. There has never been and there will never be greater love than this (John 15:13). Not because you were beautiful did our Lord sacrifice Himself. Not because of your virtue did Jesus allow Himself to be whipped and pierced with spikes. Not for what you might give to Him in return did our Lord go through shame and mockery. He simply views you as priceless. The glorious Savior, the majestic and holy Savior could not bear to lose you. His love is pure. He could not stand idly by and let you go. He spent His divine resources to bring you into the kingdom of heaven.

It's still true. Even as we sin, He comes to us, in love. Where we have only lust, He brings love. Where we have only pride, He brings humility. Where we have only thievery, He brings sacrifice. Where we have only deceit, He brings truth and fidelity and revelation. That is what it means when St. Paul writes: "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20). What will He not pay to redeem you, to ransom you, to forgive and save you?! He just wants you to know it. Why does Jesus tell these parables? He tells them to tell you what you mean to Him, to illuminate what motivates His journey to cross and tomb. Crucified, He bears our sin, our degenerate nature, our putridity. On the cross He becomes like one from whom men hide their faces (Isaiah 53:3). Yet in His distressed condition, precisely in the blood and suffering of atonement, Jesus the Christ is the Beautiful One – our Suitor who gives His life as a trade. No resource is left untapped. He emptied Himself of all He had.

Filthy rags no more! We were washed in His blood, washed in His divine blood! Baptized in His name, we belong to Him. You wonder why baptism means so much? It is His love, His triumph, His purity and His beauty which transforms sinners into saints. His love is extravagant. He dispossessed Himself of all that He had to possess you, to wash you, and to prepare you for Himself as a bride (Ephesians 5:25-27). The church is beautiful, radiant, truly virtuous, truly righteous, truly holy. It's Christ beauty, Christ's virtue, Christ's holiness – in us. His beauty is in you – the church loves the least and the lowly as she herself has been loved. *That* is beauty. The

church serves without expecting anything in return as she herself has been served by the Master. *That* is beauty. The church is Christ's holy bride. Regardless of your sin, the Lord does not recoil from you. He forgives you. The extravagant act of His love is alive in this place.

After our trader and his new wife returned from their trading trip, the island folk were surprised to see the young woman for she was the picture of feminine beauty. Her eyes were filled with joy and contentment. Her smile was gracious and accepting. That is the consequence of receiving grace upon grace. The church holds herself with regal humility for she knows the depth of what she has received – the Lord's unmerited love. Christ's love is attractive. We cling to Him and His beauty. He gives you that love this morning in His body and blood. In His eyes you are the beloved, the pearl of great price, the treasure He wills to serve with unqualified joy. Receive His service, receive the kingdom of heaven.