

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. You've heard the phrase before. Whether we're talking about people, places, or things, you've heard the phrase before – beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

But is that true?

Is beauty really in the eye of the beholder? Is something really only beautiful if I, personally, think so? Or, are there some things that are beautiful regardless of my personal opinion? Is beauty a subjective thing (where each of us has our own, unique idea of what is and is not beautiful), or an objective thing (where there are certain beautiful things whether or not you personally find them beautiful)?

Maybe it's a question you never thought to analyze, but for a minute this morning, let's think about that.

When it comes to you, personally, and your experiences in life, beauty often *is* in the eye of the beholder.

Joe finds Mary attractive, but his friend Rob isn't sure what he sees in her. But what Rob thinks doesn't matter to Joe because beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Kathy loves visiting art galleries in her spare time, but Carl would rather walk across a bed of hot coals. Instead he loves going to car shows (and you can guess how Kathy feels about those). It doesn't matter because there are plenty of art galleries and car shows to go around – beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Frank could spend all day, every day on a lake or in the woods of northern Wisconsin, but Heather hates mosquitoes with a passion, and the only trees she cares to see are the kind that grow coconuts surrounded by white sand and salty air. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

On the other hand, what about when millions or even billions of different people from many different cultures, over multiple generations all behold something as beautiful?... things like Handel's *Messiah*, or the Sistine Chapel, or the Grand Canyon?

There are certain people, books, music, art, and places whose beauty seems to transcend the idea that beauty is in the eye of the beholder because the combined weight of world history has said, "These things are beautiful."

Yeah, it's entirely possible that some of you here today could hear Handel's *Messiah* and not have your hair stand on edge; it's possible that some might never have the slightest interest in visiting the Grand Canyon; it's possible that you could stand in the Sistine Chapel be thoroughly unimpressed, but in those cases most people throughout history and around the world would tell you that you are wrong.

So, is beauty in the eye of the beholder? Well, often yes, but sometimes our eye for beauty is simply wrong. How many artists and writers died in obscurity only to have their work become priceless a few decades later because the people of their time didn't see the beauty that later generations saw?

To a degree beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but it is also entirely possible to look at something beautiful and miss the beauty - not because the thing isn't beautiful, but because you just missed it.

That's all I could think of when I read the Gospel account from Mark 6.

Jesus walks into his home town of Nazareth. Jesus, the miracle-working, attention-arresting Savior of the world walks into Nazareth and the reception is like someone walking through the Sistine Chapel wondering why someone stacked all those stones on top of each other and scribbled on the ceiling. Jesus, the perfect Son of God himself, teaches them and their reaction is like a toddler plugging his ears yelling "make it stop" to the *Halleluiah Chorus*.

Standing in front of the people of Nazareth is the incarnation of everything good, and lovely, and perfect, and beautiful, teaching them, and Mark tells us **"they took offense at him."**

It's like standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon and being mad because someone made you look at it...

While often we may say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, this account in Mark 6 makes pretty clear that it is entirely possible to look at something beautiful and miss the beauty entirely.

And when it comes to Jesus, that's a truth that we would do well to take to heart because it isn't just 1st century Israelites in the dusty town of Nazareth who run the risk of looking at Jesus only to miss out on his beauty.

This human tendency to miss out on the beauty of Jesus presents two real potential pitfalls to our hearts.

First, we run the risk of missing out on the beauty ourselves.

Even here, in a Christian church, where we have come together to worship Jesus – even here it is possible, I would even say guaranteed that in some way you are missing out on the beauty of Jesus.

Some of you here today may be head over heels in love with Jesus and what Jesus has done for you – his amazing love for you that lead him to the cross for your sins. You are in love with the beauty of what Jesus has *done*, but you may not be quite as enamored with everything Jesus has *said*...

Maybe it's what Jesus and his Bible say about the roles of men and women; maybe it is what Jesus and his Bible say about sexuality; maybe it is what Jesus and his Bible say about how you should use your hard-earned money, or what you should and shouldn't do with other Christians who don't happen to be WELS. The bottom line is, if you read your Bible carefully there are a lot of things Jesus says that are very offensive to our modern sensibilities.

Maybe there are some of you here who see the beauty in what Jesus has done for you, but are not quite so sure about the beauty of everything Jesus and his Bible say to you.

And that is not to say that it is wrong to have questions; that is not to say that you are unique and there's something horribly wrong with you if you have questions; but it is a reminder – it is entirely possible to have something beautiful standing right in front of you and be completely wrong about it. If Jesus says something that offends you, like those folks in Nazareth, it might just be a problem with you, and not with him. It is the polite, loving challenge of your God who doesn't want you to miss out on the beauty of Jesus.

And for the rest of you, you don't have to be silent doubter of the public doctrine of the WELS/Lutheran/Christian church to miss out on the beauty of Jesus. Every time you sin you miss out on the beauty of Jesus. Every careless word, every ugly thought, every selfish deed, is an unspoken rejection of the beauty of Jesus – a time when you chose your own version of beautiful words, thoughts, and actions over Jesus' definition of beautiful words, thoughts, and actions.

It is entirely possible to be staring at beauty incarnate and miss it entirely, or take it for granted. The people of Nazareth did it, and often, so do we, by missing out on the beauty ourselves.

But that's not the only potential pitfall. The second is closely related to the first: keeping our love of Jesus' beauty hidden when the world around us rejects him.

It's no secret. You live and work in this world all week long – there are a lot of people in the world, in this country, this city, your workplace, and your neighborhood who fail to see the beauty of Jesus. There are some whose opinions of Jesus go beyond mere indifference toward his beauty to despising and hating Jesus and his teachings.

The people of Nazareth took offense at Jesus and his teachings in Mark. The people of the world take offense at Jesus and his teachings today.

And as Jesus promised, this rejection of Jesus' beauty doesn't just affect him, it affects his followers too. Paul promised in that second lesson today from Timothy: **Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**

That promised persecution is happening all around the world today, and even though blatant, outward persecution isn't all that common in America, many of you experience on a daily basis a more subtle and insidious persecution, the quiet pressure of society to keep your love of Jesus to yourself.

One danger when it comes to Jesus' beauty is missing out on it ourselves, the other is hiding our love for Jesus when the world takes offense.

Simply put, the second danger to our hearts is not following through on that song so many of us boldly sang when we were little: This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. Hide it under a bushel? No. Let Satan blow it out? No. I'm gonna let it shine all the time. All the time!

Like walking through the Sistine Chapel or standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon and pretending we are not impressed, hiding our awe, love, and wonder of Jesus' beauty is no way to live.

It is entirely possible to look at something beautiful and miss the beauty, or hide our love for the beauty.

And when it comes to missing the beauty of the fine arts or the vistas of God's creation the consequences are nothing. But when that ignorance of beauty incarnate is transferred to Jesus it creates some very real and very dangerous pitfalls for our hearts.

I don't think any of us here today would feel all warm and tingly inside if Jesus looked at you and thought the same thing he did for the people of Nazareth. What did Mark say again? Jesus was **"amazed at their lack of faith."**

God forbid that Jesus would look at me and be amazed at my lack of faith, but then again, I'm pretty good at amazing myself at my lack of faith at times.

That's why we so desperately need God to help us.

You know there's a Bible story that I thought of when I thought my persistent failure to appreciate the beauty of Jesus – this lack of faith that so persistently springs up in my heart. It takes place just a little bit after this account in Nazareth (you can read about it in Mark 9). It's an interaction between Jesus and a man whose son was possessed by an evil spirit, an account where Jesus is again amazed at a lack of faith:

The man says to Jesus: **"Teacher, I brought my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."**

"O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him, but if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

“‘If you can’?” said Jesus. Everything is possible for him who believes.”

Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”

The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

Pretty awesome story about our beautiful Jesus, but it is specifically that father’s cry that I thought of with Mark 6... I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief.

I remember being confused by that when I was younger. How can this man in the same breath say he does believe but then ask Jesus to help him overcome his unbelief? But I’m not confused anymore because I need my God to do the same thing for me.

I love my Jesus. He is the most beautiful thing in this world to me. He gave me life. He gave me this world full of beautiful music, and art, and vistas. He gave me the tremendous blessings of family and friends. And most of all, I love that my Jesus will stop at nothing to bring me safely home to his side in heaven. He lived for me. He died for me. He continues to use everything in this world, the good, the bad, the ugly, to draw me closer to him and heaven every day.

I love my Jesus, I believe in Jesus, *but* every day I need him to help me overcome my unbelief – that stubborn part of my heart that wants to blind me to his beauty (that tempting voice that wants me to question Jesus’ love or his teachings, or to live in a less than beautiful way), and that easily-intimidated, fearful part of my heart that wants me to keep my love of Jesus hidden in the face of real or potential persecution.

That is why the prayer of that father makes so much sense to me now.

I love my Jesus, I believe in my Jesus, he is the most beautiful thing in the world *and* I need my God to remind me of that every day and challenge me to live like that every day, not because he might stop loving me if I don’t get my act together but because I don’t want to miss out on a single brushstroke of this portrait of my God’s love for me in Jesus. I don’t want to miss out on a single hue in the vista of God’s grace in Jesus. I want to hear every note of God’s masterpiece of mercy.

God grant that every day he would help us overcome our unbelief, that every day he would clear the crud from our eyes and gunk from our ears so we can see and hear and know that when it comes to Jesus, beauty isn’t in the eye of the beholder.

God grant it. Amen.