



# TOUCHSTONES

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## Beauty

## Wisdom Story



### Introduction to the Theme

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

Plato took up the concept of beauty in his dialogue, *Philebus*. There, Socrates spoke of the pleasure evoked by things that are “beautiful intrinsically.” The response of the individual beholding such beauty was one of pleasure or delight. This idea of intrinsic beauty, which suggested that beauty was an objective reality, severely limited the range of things that could be considered beautiful. The idea and ideal of objective beauty persisted into the Middle Ages. With the Enlightenment, beauty became subjective as David Hume wrote, “Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty.”

Widespread acceptance of the idea

that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” and thus purely subjective, helped to marginalize the value of beauty in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Further, notes Crispin Sartwell, the 20<sup>th</sup> century “abandoned beauty as the dominant goal of the arts.” More recently, the rehabilitation of beauty has been undertaken by philosophers like Sartwell, Elaine Scarry (see page 5), Arthur Danto, and Alexander Nehamas. Sartwell “attributes beauty neither exclusively to the subject nor to



the object, but to the relation between them, and even more widely also to the situation or environment in which they are both embedded.”

Our principles address the first two elements of the trinity of Truth, Goodness (or Justice), and Beauty. Beauty is not addressed directly, but it relates to through “inherent worth and dignity” and “transcending mystery and wonder.” The UUA Commission on Appraisal’s consideration of the principles

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### Beauty & the Common Good

French philosopher Jacques Maritain argued that the final end of the state should be the common good. A primary means of achieving this end was social justice. Suggesting that the common good may be called something beautiful, he considered social justice to be a fine art. For him, the characteristics of beauty were integrity, proportion, and clarity. Finally, he argued that beauty produced love. In referring to his moral code, Albert Camus wrote, “Yes, there is beauty and there are the humiliated. Whatever the difficulties the enterprise may present, I would like never to be unfaithful either to one or the others.”

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### Beauty: a story from the Sufi tradition

There was once a king who enjoyed spending his spare time in the company of philosophers and friends, debating various subjects. One afternoon, the debate was about where beauty lies. As they were talking together on the terrace of the palace, the king and his friends could see their children playing in the courtyard. The king called to one of his servants. He gave him a jeweled crown and asked him to place it upon the head of the most beautiful child in the courtyard. The servant took the crown and walked out to the middle of the courtyard where all the children were playing, as their parents watched from the terrace. First, the servant placed the crown on the head of the king’s son. He saw that it suited him well. The boy was a handsome lad but, the servant was not satisfied. He tried it on several children, until he came upon his own son, who was sitting in the corner. He placed the jeweled crown on his son’s head and found that it suited him wonderfully. The servant then took his son by the hand and led him to the king. When he reached the terrace, he bowed his head, saying, “Sire, I have found that of all the children, the crown suits this one best. Indeed, if I tell the truth, I must say this. I am ashamed to appear so bold, for the child is the son of my humble self.” Then the king and those beside him laughed heartily and thanked the servant, for they thought his son to be very ugly indeed. The king said to the servant, “You have certainly told me what I wish to know: It is the heart that perceives beauty.”

Source: <http://indiajiva.wordpress.com/2007/03/09/beauty-is-in-the-heart-of-the-beholder%E2%80%A6a-sufi-story/>

## Reimagining the Common Good

## The Soul's Need

### The Necessity of Beauty

Professor Thomas Troeger



There is a sadness to a religious faith that fails to embrace the role of beauty....

...[Patrick Sherry writes,] "The lack of a theology of beauty, both of beauty in general and of divine beauty in particular, follows in part from fear and suspicion of the question, expressed in pejorative terms like "aestheticism" and "elitism."... Even those who have widened their concept of beauty to include moral and spiritual beauty have often failed to relate these to natural and artistic beauty...."

...We live in an age where beauty has been commercialized and degraded. I think here of "the beautiful people" or "the beautiful life." Beauty is reduced to being young, fit, rich, and glamorous. It is a lifestyle of extravagant consumption....

...The countercultural vision of beauty includes a prophetic perspective that employs beauty in nurturing justice and peace [as John de Gruchy writes]: "The beautiful serves transformation... for art does not simply mirror reality but challenges it's destructive and alienating tendencies, making up what is lacking and anticipating future possibilities."

...[Tina Beattie writes,] we are engaged in "a battle between vast destructive systems which feed on sameness, uniformity and power, and the fragile diversity of the human species as we struggle to evolve, not according to some evolutionary myth of progress, but according to that innate desire within our species to make meaning, to imagine worlds, to create beauty, even in the midst of violence and destruction."

We need preaching that contributes to this ...work of making meaning, imagining worlds, and creating beauty.

Source: <http://reflections.yale.edu/article/divine-radiance-keeping-faith-beauty/necessity-beauty>



## Hunger for Beauty

### Awakening & Surrendering to Beauty

John O'Donohue



We live between the act of awakening and the act of surrender. ...They frame each day and each life; between them is the journey where anything can happen, the beauty and the frailty.

...The human soul is hungry for beauty; we seek it everywhere—in landscape, music, art, clothes, furniture, gardening, companionship, love, religion, and in ourselves. ...When we experience the Beautiful, there is a sense of homecoming ...for it meets the needs of our soul. ...In the experience of beauty we awaken and surrender in the same act.

...These times are riven with anxiety and uncertainty given the current global crisis. In the hearts of people, some natural ease has been broken. Our trust in the future has lost its innocence. ...At first, it sounds completely naive to suggest that now might be the time to invoke and awaken beauty. Why? Because there is nowhere else to turn and we are desperate; furthermore, it is because we have so disastrously neglected the Beautiful that we now find ourselves in such terrible crisis.

...Much of the stress and emptiness that haunt us can be traced back to our lack of attention to beauty. Internally the mind becomes coarse and dull if it remains unvisited by images and thoughts that hold the radiance of beauty.

...Beauty is another order, a deeper level. When we allow ourselves under the persuasion of beauty, our encounter gains integrity, and integrity is the heart of integration, which is the gift we most desperately need now.

Source: *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* by John O'Donohue, 2004, HarperCollins paperback 2005

## So Much to Beauty!

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to the Theme** (2006 to 2009) proposed adding "beauty and joy" to "worth and dignity."

Elaine Scarry writes, "when beauty enlarges our hearts, our capacity to care for what is just and true enlarges." Poet Carlton Turner writes, "what is beauty / without justice? / a hollow shell. / a shallow façade / anxiously anticipating / time's decay / exposing the space / where it's soul should be." Related to these sentiments is Thomas Troeger's assertion that, "The countercultural vision of beauty includes a prophetic perspective that employs beauty in nurturing justice and peace." His concern that "beauty has been commercialized and degraded" (see page 2) is significant for this trivializes beauty, on the one hand, and establishes standards of beauty that are unrealistic and harmful, to women, generally, and teenage girls, specifically. These superficial "standards" of beauty promote negative body image, distorted images of beauty that fully ignore diversity and cultural differences, and the bullying that springs from rigid rules about appearance. A commendable countercultural approach to beauty is the Japanese ideal of *wabi-sabi*, which finds beauty in imperfection.

Troeger makes it clear that we need a theology of beauty and that "we need preaching that contributes to the strenuous work of making meaning, imaging worlds, and creating beauty."

**Beauty Speaks:** Friedrich Nietzsche said that "the voice of beauty speaks softly; it creeps only into the most fully awakened souls." Antoine de Saint Exupéry added, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

**Beauty Invites:** Like moth to flame, we human beings are drawn to beauty. It is an invitation to life and to wholeness. In some strange way, beauty completes us, both the inner beauty that we cultivate over a lifetime, as well as the beauty that we encounter daily.

**Beauty Nourishes:** We seek bread, not stones, but bread is not enough for it will nourish our body, but not our soul. Like some spiritual multi-vitamin, there is a

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## Readings from the Common Bowl



**Day 1:** "We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty." Maya Angelou

**Day 2:** "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart" Helen Keller

**Day 3:** "You are imperfect, permanently and inevitably flawed. And you are beautiful." Amy Bloom

**Day 4:** "We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is, knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out." Ray Bradbury

**Day 5:** "Beauty is only skin deep, but ugly goes clean to the bone." Dorothy Parker

**Day 6:** "So many things become beautiful when you really look." Lauren Oliver

**Day 7:** "Enjoy the power and beauty of your youth. Oh, never mind. You will not understand the power and beauty of your youth until they've faded." Mary Schmich

**Day 8:** "Beauty is not in the face; beauty is a light in the heart." Kahlil Gibran

**Day 9:** "Anyone who keeps the ability to see beauty never grows old." Franz Kafka

**Day 10:** "Our wounds are often the openings into the best and most beautiful part of us." David Richo

**Day 11:** "I am not pretty. I am not beautiful. I am as radiant as the sun." Suzanne Collins

**Day 12:** "People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within." Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

**Day 13:** "Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to

kneel and kiss the ground." Rumi

**Day 14:** "With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world." Max Ehrmann

**Day 15:** "The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen." Elisabeth Kübler-Ross



**Day 16:** "To be beautiful means to be yourself. You don't need to be accepted by others. You need to accept yourself." Thích Nhất Hạnh

**Day 17:** "It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength." Maya Angelou

**Day 18:** "The flower that blooms in adversity is the rarest and most beautiful of all." the movie Mulan

**Day 19:** "Having eyes, but not seeing beauty; having ears, but not hearing music; having minds, but not perceiving truth.... These are the things to fear...." Tetsuko Kuroyanagi

**Day 20:** "Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty." Anonymous

**Day 21:** "When I am working on a problem I never think about beauty. I only think about how to solve the problem. But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong." Buckminster Fuller

**Day 22:** "Each of us is an artist whose task it is to shape life into some semblance of the pattern we dream about. The molding is not of self alone, but of shared tomorrows and times we shall never see. So, let us be about our task. The materials are very precious and perishable." Arthur Graham

**Day 23:** "Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts." Rachel Carson

**Day 24:** "Beauty feeds us from the same source that created us. It reminds us of the shaping power that reaches through the flower stem and through our own hands." Scott Russell Sanders

**Day 25:** "The ability to see beauty is the beginning of our moral sensibility. What we believe is beautiful we will not wantonly destroy." John Constable

**Day 26:** "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul." John Muir

**Day 27:** "They shouldn't call it the beauty aisle, that place in the store with all the make-up. Call it the decoration aisle. I know what beauty is. It's not in the store. It's everywhere. May it be above you, below you, and all around you." Meg Barnhouse

**Day 28:** "It's the beauty within us that makes it possible for us to recognize the beauty around us." Joan Chittister

**Day 29:** "If you try to view yourself through the lenses that others offer you, all you will see are distortions; your own light and beauty will become blurred, awkward, and ugly. Your sense of inner beauty has to remain a very private thing." John O'Donohue

**Day 30:** "Whatever may be the tensions and the stresses of a particular day, there is always lurking close at hand the trailing beauty of forgotten joy or unremembered peace." Howard Thurman

**Day 31:** "It is an absolute human certainty that no one can know his [or her] own beauty or perceive a sense of his [or her] own worth until it has been reflected back ...in the mirror of another loving, caring human being." John J. Powell



blessing we have to give. As Rumi said, 'Let the beauty we love be what we do.' Let us, in faith with all those who have

gone before us, place ourselves among those who bless the world."

Finally, in her essay, *What Shall We Do With All This Beauty?* (*Blessing The World: What Can Save Us Now*, edited by Rob Hardies, 2006), Parker offers a reflection on James Baldwin. She writes, "At the end of his extraordinary essay, *The Fire Next Time* (1963), James Baldwin poses a question. Most of the essay is a keen and painful exposition of the depth of loss and grief people of African descent experience in North American culture. Drawing on his experiences growing up in the ghettos of New York City, Baldwin shows us how self-loathing grows in a culture that tells a black child his presence is not welcome. He reveals how a sense of the sacredness of other human



## Keeping Faith with Beauty

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker returns to the necessity of beauty again and again. In her essay, *Spiritual Practice for Our Time in Everyday Spiritual Practice*, edited by Scott Alexander, 1999 she writes, "This question challenges me more than any other in life: How do I live in a way that keeps faith with beauty — with the beauty I have known, the beauty of all people everywhere, the beauty of the earth? How do I resist the violence that tears us from one another and from the earth? When the violence goes deep into the core of the human soul, as it has in mine, how is the heart restored?"

In another essay, *Rising to the Challenge of our Times* (*Redeeming Time*, edited by Walter Herz, 1998), Parker writes about Moses' encounter with the burning bush. God commands him to lead the Jews out of Egypt. Moses is reluctant, God insistent. You know the rest of the story. Parker writes, "Beauty



confronts us with the requirement that we place ourselves among the saviors, the redeemers, the leaders in the protection of life. Once you have seen the bush on fire, you are not going to get out of the assignment unless you close your eyes to the beauty. But if you have seen, if you have taken off your shoes [knowing you were on holy ground], tasted the blackberries, and felt the tenderness of love, if you have seen how the full force of the soul is in each child that comes into this world, you either have to close your eyes ... or you will have to go back to Egypt to set the people free." Like God, beauty is insistent. It confronts us with a moral imperative. Parker concludes, "More is asked of us than we have imagined. The blessing of life is that it will not let us go until we ourselves have offered the

beings is lost, how relationship is severed, how ugliness permeates all aspects of living, and how despair closes down over people's lives."

"But at the end of the essay, Baldwin invokes the rhythms of jazz, the resilience of spirit, the freshness of new life embodied in children growing up in the communi-

ty, and he says, 'The question remains: What do we do with all this beauty?' The greatest challenge in our lives is the challenge presented to us by the beauty of life, by what beauty asks of us, and by what we must do to keep faith with the beauty that has nourished our lives."

"What do we do with all this beauty? What do we do when, in the midst of the most terrible ugliness, the loss of natural and human splendor, something of beauty still shines through?"

The Rev. Dr. Galen Guengerich presented *Theology in a Secular Age* at a General Assembly. As an example of a religious impulse not fundamentally rational, he quoted Baron Wormser, who wrote, "What would happen if I heeded the admonitions of beau-



ty?" This is an essential question. Again, the moral imperative. Ethically, according to Guengerich, beauty leads us toward the ideal of fairness and grounds our actions in service of that ideal. As Guengerich, "To be swept away by aspiration of a Bach oratorio is to become tirelessly impatient with a world where so many children have so little hope. ...To be riveted by the sight of an exuberantly colored butterfly is to know that we must stand strong against those who would crush the fragile and oppress the weak."



## Too Uncommon

### The Common Good

Rev. Richard Gilbert



The common good is not the mere aggregation of private wants; rather, it is an expression of our common humanity.

...The common good is better understood as a value embodied by a group of people who share in one another's fates and commitment themselves to bettering the fate of each individual. In an increasingly interdependent society and world, this kind of collaboration is far more than a religious desideratum. It is, in fact, a survival skill. The common good has to do with our need for one another, for we are basically social creatures who find meaning in our interactions with our neighbors. Without understanding ourselves as members of a society over time and space, we forget how much we depend on others, on society as a whole. Music, art, literature [that is, vehicles for beauty]—so much that is humanly worthwhile—are inconceivable without understanding individuals as members. We define ourselves essentially by our relationship to the wider community. Even our most personal achievements cannot be understood without realizing our debt to humanity.

Source: *How Much Do We Deserve?* Richard Gilbert, p 126, Skinner House Books, Boston, 2001.

### Making Beautiful Music from Garbage

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

In 2006, Favio Chávez, an environmental engineer, was working on a recycling program in Cateura, a slum a few miles south of the city of Asunción, the capital of Paraguay. Cateura is home to the country's main landfill. About 3 million pounds of garbage are dumped there daily. The people living there scavenge for things in the garbage piles and sell them.

As a child, Señor Chávez learned to play the clarinet and guitar. He became the choir director at his church when he was 11. Señor Chávez began giving children in Cateura music lessons, but he had many more students than instruments. A violin cost more than a house in Cateura. He discussed the problem with Nicolás "Colá" Gómez, who is known as Don Colá. He was a *ganchero* (a person who recycles garbage) and a former carpenter. The only source of materials was the garbage dump. Armed with creativity, Don Colá began making musical instruments out of what he found in the dump: old forks, knives, and spoons, oven trays, bottle caps, large cans, x-ray film and more. He made a cello using an oil barrel and tuning knobs from a hair brush, a wooden spoon, and the heel of a shoe.



With children and teenagers eager to find beauty by making music and these amazing instruments, the *Recycled Orchestra of Cateura* was born. In 2011, Señor Chávez quit his job to devote all of his energy to the orchestra. The story of the orchestra is told in the documentary film, *Landfill Harmonic*. In 2015 it was featured at the South by Southwest Film Festival.

The documentary features Chávez and Gómez along with amazing teens including Juan Manuel Chavea, nicknamed

Bebi, who plays the cello, and Ada Mari-bel Ríos Bogado, who plays the violin. Ada is also featured in the children's book *Ada's Violin: The Story of the Recycled Orchestra of Paraguay* written by Susan Hood and illustrated by Sally Wern Comport.



Hood writes, "With her violin, Ada could close her eyes and imagine a different life. She could soar on the high, bright, bitter-sweet notes to a place far away. She could be who she was meant to be."

It's hard to imagine children surrounded by garbage, living in the midst of it, with contaminated water and the odor of landfill, with such poverty. And then, for them to create such beauty.

The Recycled Orchestra has performed for politicians, monarchs, and Pope Francis. The orchestra has played Mozart, Paraguayan folk music, and more. They have backed up artists like Stevie Wonder, Metallica, and Megadeth. They are also featured, appropriately, in violinist Lindsey Stirling's music video *Transcendence* (*Orchestral*).

In one video Ada says, "When I listen to the sound of a violin, I feel butterflies in my stomach." Tania Vera adds, "My life would be worthless without music." As Señor Chávez put it, "no tener nada no es excusa para no hacer nada": "having nothing is no excuse to do nothing."

#### Family Activity: Making Beauty

Purchase the book, *Ada's Violin* and read it to your children. You can also watch the video of the book being read at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzPyF3JYcfU>.

Then invite your children to make beauty from recycled materials. A good source for ideas can be found at <https://www.favecrafts.com/Green-Crafting/659-Recycled-Crafts-Crafting-with-Recyclable-Items>.

### On Beauty and Being Just

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

Elaine Scarry, a professor at Harvard University, has long asserted that the encounter with beauty can propel us toward the work of justice. She shares this perspective with philosophers like Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch who believed that "beauty prepares us for justice." Scarry restates the age old question of which comes first, the chicken or the egg, by asking whether justice or beauty came first. She argues that the human apprehension of beauty preceded concerns for justice.



A prominent philosophic feature of beauty, regardless of how it is expressed, is symmetry. In like measure, this is also true of justice, especially distributive justice. The symmetry of justice is weighted in two directions though the symbol of the scales of justice. By comparison, Aristotle visualized justice as a perfect cube, equidistant in all directions. Related to symmetry, is fairness, both aesthetic fairness and ethical fairness. As Scarry writes, "'fairness,' is used both in referring to loveliness of countenance and in referring to the ethical requirement for 'being fair,' 'playing fair,' and 'fair distribution.'"

The trinity of Truth, Goodness (or Justice), and Beauty are compelling in her argument as she states that beauty "ignites the desire for truth," just as beholding beauty invites us to be attentive to the world. It is this attention that makes us acutely aware of injustice.

She notes that beauty is either natural or artifactual (i.e., made by humans), but justice is only artifactual. Scarry writes, "Because beauty repeatedly brings us face-to-face with our own powers to create, we know where and how to locate those powers when a situation of injustice calls on us...."

Concerned that we have become "beauty-blind" because the perceived value of beauty has been so diminished by political complaints, Scarry states that when we confront beauty we should educate our self and work to repair the world.

Source: <https://blogs.aalto.fi/researchinart/files/2012/10/scarryBEAUTY.pdf>

## Beauty's Truth

### Beauty will Save the World

Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, from his Nobel Lecture in Literature, 1970

Dostoevsky once said, ... "Beauty will save the world." What does this mean? ... Was such a thing possible? When in our bloodthirsty history did beauty ever save anyone from anything? Ennobled, elevated, yes; but whom has it saved?

There is, however, something special in the essence of beauty, a special quality in art: the conviction carried by a genuine work of art is absolute and subdues even a resistant heart. ... That is why they inspire trust—and distrust.

...A work of art contains its verification in itself: artificial, strained concepts do not withstand the test of being turned into images; they fall to pieces, turn out to be sickly and pale, convince no one. Works which draw on truth and present it to us in live and concentrated form grip us, compellingly involve us, and no one ever, not even ages hence, will come forth to refute them.

Perhaps then the old trinity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty is not simply the



dressed-up, worn-out formula we thought it in our presumptuous, materialistic youth? If the crowns of these three trees meet, as scholars have asserted, and if the too obvious, too straight sprouts of Truth

and Goodness have been knocked down, cut off, not let grow, perhaps the whimsical, unpredictable, unexpected branches of Beauty will work their way through, rise up to that very place, and thus complete the work of all three? ...

And in that case could not art and literature, in fact, help the modern world?

Source: [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-lecture.html)



## Perfectly Beautiful

### One Hundred Flowers

Rev. Nancy Bowen

One Hundred Flowers is a collection of Georgia

O'Keeffe's paintings of flowers. The originals were up to 6' tall. One art critic said that her paintings made it, "as if we humans were butterflies." O'Keeffe told Mary Lynn Kotz of *ArtNews*: "That was in the 20s, and everything was going so fast. Nobody had time to reflect.... There was a cup and saucer, a spoon and a flower. Well, the flower was perfectly beautiful. It was exquisite, but it was so small you really could not appreciate it for itself. So then and there I decided to paint that flower in all its beauty. If I could paint that flower in a huge scale, then you could not ignore its beauty."

O'Keeffe also brought the austere landscapes of the southwest to the attention of art audiences. Observing with the artist's eye, she saw the wide spaces, mountains, and blue skies as an invitation to explore beauty from a new perspective.

We can learn to see beauty in the new and the different. Unitarian Universalism encourages us to develop new eyes (new ears, new hearts) and new capacities to see (hear and understand) beauty and value in the diversity of our human, natural, and constructed world. This can be a struggle, but you can make it a spiritual practice by:

- opening oneself to the new without judgment;
- immersing oneself in the experience without analysis;
- allowing it to affect you;
- considering another's experience;
- recognizing the personal or cultural meaning others associate;
- engaging with holy curiosity to understand from a perspective other than your own; and
- seeing beauty where none had been before.



## Beautiful Language

### Six Names of Beauty

Crispin Sartwell

**English:** Beauty is the object of longing.... Longing itself is an enduring ... state of desire. ... Since we all long, beauty is a universal object of human experience. [Because] ... different epochs, cultures, groups, or individuals have different longings, ... beauty will have different objects.

**Hebrew:** The original meaning of *yapha* is "to be bright, to glow".... [T]he term indicates a quality of the beautiful thing or person, rather than of the perceiver: a thing ... exudes its beauty. Beauty is something the beautiful object sheds or emits, like light....

**Sanskrit:** Of all the Sanskrit terms for beauty, the primary one is *sundara*. ... The idea that the worship of God and the experience of earthly beauty could be actually the same thing ... coaxes us from our senses and their world toward the mystery that cannot be sensed.

**Greek:** The Greek words for beautiful (*kalos*) and beauty (*to kalon*) have moral as well as aesthetic force. They refer to "nobility" as well as what we would think of as direct visual beauty.... The *kalos*, the beautiful, is above all, we might say, what is drenched in light.

**Japan:** ... *Wabi-sabi* is an aesthetic of poverty and loneliness, imperfection and austerity, affirmation and melancholy. *Wabi-sabi* is the beauty of the .withered, weathered, tarnished, scarred, intimate, coarse, earthly, ...tentative, ephemeral.

**Navajo:** ... *Hózhó* refers equally to a state of human beings, a state of the objects around them, and a state of the universe as whole. It is usually translated into English as "beauty," though also as "health," "balance," "harmony," or "goodness"....

Source: <http://www.tparkerchurch.org/sermons/20102011/Beauty-Meaning.htm>



### Science: The Quest for Beauty

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

Alfred North Whitehead suggested that beauty structures and directs the final aim of the universe. He wrote, "Science and art are the consciously determined pursuit of Truth and of Beauty."

The Noble laureate, Subrahmanyam Chandrasekhar, in his 1979 lecture, *Beauty and the Quest for Beauty in Science*, explored "the extent to which the quest for beauty is an aim in the pursuit of science." He explored the influence of beauty in the work of Henri Poincaré, Werner Heisenberg, and Albert Einstein.

Poincaré wrote, "The scientist does not study nature because it is useful; he studies it because he delights in it, and he delights in it because it is beautiful. If nature were not beautiful, it would not be worth knowing, and if nature were not worth knowing, life would not be worth living. Of course I do not here speak of that beauty that strikes the senses, the beauty of qualities and appearances; not that I undervalue such beauty, far from it, but it has nothing to do with science; I mean that profounder beauty which comes from the harmonious order of the parts, and which a pure intelligence can grasp."

In a letter to Einstein, Heisenberg wrote, "You may object that by speaking of simplicity and beauty I am introducing aesthetic criteria of truth, and I frankly admit that I am strongly attracted by the simplicity and beauty of mathematical schemes which nature presents us. You must have felt this too: the almost frightening simplicity and wholeness of the relationship, which nature suddenly spreads out before us." While looking at energy at the quantum level, Heisenberg said, "I had the feeling that, through the surface of atomic phenomena, I was looking at a strangely beautiful interior, and felt almost giddy at the thought that I know

how to probe this wealth of mathematical structure nature had so generously spread out before me."

Einstein was especially enamored with the beauty of the universe. In his essay, *The World as I See It*, he wrote, "The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed." In that same essay he explained the power of beauty: "The ideals that have lighted my way, and time after time have given me new courage to face life cheerfully, have been Kindness, Beauty, and Truth."

Murray Gell-Mann observed that, "a chief criterion for the selection of a correct hypothesis... seems to be the criterion of beauty, simplicity, or elegance." It should not surprise us that beauty is a pathway to truth in science, as well as in art.

Below is an imaginative presentation of what Van Gogh saw when he painted *The Starry Night* in June 1889 while he was in The Saint-Paul-de-Mausole Asylum near Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. He said, "Looking at the stars always makes me dream." Van Gogh was also involved in both the quest for beauty and the quest for truth. Did he see what Einstein and other physicists and astronomers saw when they looked up into the night-time sky?



### The Rose Has No Why

Dorothee Söelle, Theologian

What does the rose tell us?

*The rose has no why; it blooms because it blooms. It notes not itself, asks not if it be seen.*



In this couplet, the poet Silesius summarizes his answer to the question of the meaning of life. Whereas we ordinarily think we are more than a rose, belonging to a higher order of being, he makes the rose the image and exemplar of true being. It is without purpose, not there for some other reason, not for use, but meaningful in itself. For what is beautiful is holy all by itself. It is not a means to something else.

For many years I have been engaged in the peace movement, and the question I am asked most often is, of course, the one about success: *What is the point of it all?* But I have come to realize that any thinking that is oriented solely toward success is essentially cynical. For the rose has no why, and one has to do some things, even when they meet with no success now.

Source: <http://www.firstuucolumbus.org/images/sermons/2009/2008-10-19%20The%20Beauty%20of%20it,%20Rev.%20Mark%20Belletini.pdf>

(Continued from page 2) **Intro to the Theme** minimum daily requirement of beauty for human beings. When we surround ourselves with beauty, life becomes more beautiful.

**Beauty Comforts:** There is a wildness in all things, including human beings. There are ways in which we want to cultivate that wildness because of the energy and power that it confers, and there are ways in which we need to soothe that wildness. Beauty is a wonderful balm.

**Beauty Inspires:** Beauty can be a source of inspiration, even in science (see the article on this page). I think of the beauty of the newborn or adopted child and know that this beauty, this being, is an inspiration to his or her parents.

**Beauty Transforms:** As we increase our capacity to sense and welcome and practice beauty, we are transformed. To practice acts of beauty is to engage in a spiritual discipline.

# Small Group Discussion Guide

## Theme for Discussion: Beauty

**Preparation prior to Gathering:** (Read this issue of *Explorations* and the questions.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** “Beauty can be consoling, disturbing, sacred, profane; it can be exhilarating, appealing, inspiring, chilling. It can affect us in an unlimited variety of ways. Yet it is never viewed with indifference: beauty demands to be noticed; it speaks to us directly like the voice of an intimate friend. If there are people who are indifferent to beauty, then it is surely because they do not perceive it.” *Roger Scruton*

**Chalice Lighting** (James Vila Blake)  
(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story:** Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

**Reading:** “We discern beauty in concrete objects and abstract ideas, in works of nature and works of art, in things, animals and people, in objects, qualities and actions. As the list expands to take in just about every ontological category (there are beautiful propositions as well as beautiful worlds, beautiful proofs as well as beautiful snails, even beautiful diseases and beautiful

deaths), it becomes obvious that we are not describing a property like shape,

size, or color, uncontroversially present to all who can find their way around the physical world. For one thing: how could there be a single property exhibited by so many disparate types of thing?” *Roger Scruton*

### Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. What were your experiences of beauty as a child? How did they affect you?
2. Where were the places that you have found beauty? What do those places mean to you?
3. Were you encouraged or discouraged to create beauty? How did those messages influence your sense of creativity?
4. How did the messages about external beauty and internal beauty affect you in terms of both self-esteem and self-image? Do you agree with Emerson that as we grow older, beauty steals inward? Why or why not?
5. What is the purpose of beauty? The meaning of beauty? The value of beauty?
6. What have you done, would you do in response to beauty?
7. How do you cultivate beauty?
8. Do you agree with Elaine Scarry (page 5) that there is relationship between beauty and the work for justice? Why or why not?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing Chalice** (Elizabeth Selle Jones)  
*We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

### Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

# In Struggle, Beauty

## Collateral Beauty

Rev. Nancy Bowen

This film with its provocative title was released in December 2016. While it was panned by critics, I commend it to you as an unexpected, disarming, and thoughtful perspective on beauty in the midst of profound human struggle. Without revealing the plot line, which will leave you with questions as well as a “message,” it explores the critical relationship between beauty, meaning, and love. The wisdom story suggests that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, in the meaning of the relationship. O’Keefe encourages us to look closely and to see the minute details that result in beauty. Söelle encourages us to practice seeing and accepting beauty without the need for analysis and judgment. How do you experience beauty in your own life? Is it primarily visual, auditory, cognitive, some combination? What is your Beauty Way?

When have you experienced beauty from an unexpected source?



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