**Sermon on Mark 6:1-6**

**“Beauty, Whether the Eye Beholds It or Not”**

**Original Sermon**

by Rev. Hoff, preached July 8, 2018

at St. Paul’s Ev. Lutheran Church (WELS), Franklin, WI

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 *Mark 6:1Jesus went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. 2When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! 3Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. 4Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” 5He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6And he was amazed at their lack of faith.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. 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 beautiful only if I, personally, think so? Or, are there some things that are beautiful regardless of my opinion? Is beauty a subjective thing (where each of us has our own, unique idea of beauty), or is it an objective thing (where certain things are beautiful whether or not you personally see their beauty)?

Joe finds Mary attractive, but his friend Richard isn’t sure what he sees in her. But what Richard 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 hunting and fishing, 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 (and what constitutes a vacation) is in the eye of the beholder.

*On the other hand,* what about when millions or even billions of different people from many 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 transcends the idea that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. For some things, the combined weight of world history has said, “These things are beautiful.”

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 not have the slightest interest in ever visiting the Grand Canyon. 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? Often yes, but sometimes our eye for beauty is simply wrong. It is entirely possible to look at beauty and miss the beauty – not because the thing isn’t beautiful, but because you just missed it.

The thought of missed beauty crosses a mind when we hear the Gospel account from Mark 6. Jesus walked into his home town of Nazareth. Jesus, the miracle-working, attention-arresting Savior of the world walked into Nazareth and the reception was like… it was like someone walking through the Sistine Chapel wondering why someone stacked all those stones on top of each other and scribbled on the ceiling. Standing in front of the people of Nazareth is the incarnation of everything good and right. As he teaches them, 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…

We may say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but this account in Mark 6 makes it pretty clear that it is entirely possible to look at something beautiful and totally miss the beauty. When it comes to Jesus, that’s a truth that we should take to heart because it isn’t just 1st century Israelites in the dusty town of Nazareth who miss out on his beauty. This human tendency to miss out on the beauty of Jesus presents two real potential pitfalls to our hearts.

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

Even 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 awestruck by what Jesus has done for you – his amazing love for you that led him to the cross for your sins. You admire 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. That is not to say that it is wrong to have questions. That is not to say that if you have questions, you must be an outlier and unlike all the rest of us. However, the idea that we should stop and think if we don’t see the beauty in what Jesus tells us—that is a reminder that 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 loving and even gentle challenge of your God who doesn’t want you to miss out on the beauty of Jesus.

**II.** Missing out on the Savior’s beauty is not the only potential pitfall. While that is an internal loss, **the second pitfall** is an external problem: 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 this city, your workplace, and your neighborhood who do not appreciate the beauty of Jesus. There are some whose opinions of Jesus go beyond indifference to finding Jesus and his teachings just plain ugly. The people of Nazareth took offense at Jesus and his teachings. The people of the world take offense at Jesus and his teachings today.

Jesus told his followers it would be this way. Paul, in today’s lesson from Second Timothy, said: *“Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”* (3:12). Even though blatant, outward persecution isn’t all that common in America, many of you experience a more subtle and insidious persecution, the quiet pressure of society to keep your love of Jesus to yourself.

One danger regarding Jesus’ beauty is missing out on it ourselves, the other is burying our appreciation of Jesus when the world takes offense. Simply put, the second danger to our hearts is not following through on that song many of us 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!”* We sang it boldly back then. But we let it shine more cautiously now. Like refusing to share the wonder of a once-in-a-lifetime vacation to the Grand Canyon or Alaska, hiding our awe and wonder of Jesus is no way to live.

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 dangerous pitfalls for our hearts. Each and every one of us would feel ashamed if Jesus looked at you and thought the same thing he did of the people of Nazareth. What did he think of them? 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.

These thoughts about my failures to appreciate Jesus’ beauty reminded me of another event from his life. It took place a little while after this event in Nazareth—you can read about it in Mark 9. It’s about a man who brought a son possessed by an evil spirit to Jesus:

The man said 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… 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.*

That is an awesome testimony about what makes Jesus beautiful, but it is specifically that father’s cry that I want to compare with our reading. That father cried out, *“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 also ask Jesus to help him overcome his unbelief? I’ve grown up and I’m not confused anymore. No longer being a child, my faith is less childlike than it once was—and that is a bad thing. There are some things that when Jesus says it, instead of believing it like a child, I immediately ask, “But what about…?” At that moment I need to pray, “Lord, help me overcome my unbelief.”

Jesus is the most beautiful thing in this world. He gave me life. He gave me this world full of beautiful music, and art, and vistas. He gave me the 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 to draw me closer to him.

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 teachings, or to live in a less than beautiful way). I need him to conquer that easily-intimidated, fearful part of my heart that wants me to keep my love of Jesus hidden from those who disapprove.

I need my God to remind me of that every day and to strengthen me to live boldly 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 a single brushstroke of the portrait of God’s love for me in Jesus. I want to hear every note of God’s masterpiece of mercy.

God grant that every day he would also help you overcome your unbelief, that every day he would clear the crud from your eyes and gunk from your ears so you can see and hear the true beauty of Jesus, no matter what the beholders think. God grant it. Amen.