

Isaiah 60:1-13 ^{NIV} "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. ² See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. ³ Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ⁴ "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. ⁵ Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. ⁶ Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD. ⁷ All Kedar's flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple. ⁸ "Who are these that fly along like clouds, like doves to their nests? ⁹ Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, {9 Or the trading ships} bringing your sons from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honor of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour. ¹⁰ "Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favour I will show you compassion. ¹¹ Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations-- their kings led in triumphal procession. ¹² For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined. ¹³ "The glory of Lebanon will come to you, the pine, the fir and the cypress together, to adorn the place of my sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of my feet.

Revelation 21:1-4 ^{NIV} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Philippians 4:4-9 ^{NIV} ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

“Things that Will Endure: Beauty”

It often happens that people stop in here at the church just to have a look inside. They say, “I pass by this church all the time and just thought I’d stop this time and see what it looks like.” When we have community events here I frequently have people come up to me and say, “I’ve passed by this church for years and now I finally get to see the inside of it.” Quite often we have people who want to get married here because they pass by here often and they like the surroundings and we’re accessible and easy for people to find, a prominent landmark by the highway. Almost everyone who sees the inside of this church describes it as beautiful. “You’ve a beautiful church.” “You’ve a beautiful sanctuary.” Then, we usually talk about how old it is. They will remark that the congregation must care a lot about their church. We talk about the renovations that happened here in the 80’s and 90’s and about how the scrolling on the wall behind me had been painted over, and how there were some folks in the church back then that knew how to lift paint and that there is an emblem of a burning bush underneath the wallboard on the back wall that no one is going to look for without having a general idea of where it is at. If I get the chance, I tell them about the group of women who stripped the paint from the wood in the front foyer calling themselves “*The Claude Strippers.*”

We do have a beautiful sanctuary here, the whole church for that matter, but the sanctuary in particular, and it does show that the people inside care and are active. Speaking for myself, this sanctuary is different than most churches its age. It's not blandly white and austere and covered with cheap carpet that somebody way back when glued down to the detriment of the wood floors below. It doesn't look like it's stuck in a day gone by yet, it harbours its history. It has warmth and looks its best in the Fall (no pun intended). It's hospitable. The scrolling on the wall (The Lord is in his temple. Let all the earth keep silence.) does not say, "Sit down and shut up" as our denominations former church growth specialist said. It invokes reverence of God. It says this place is holy and the Holy One is here. There is indeed beauty here. The Lord has endowed this place and congregation with splendour; adorned you that you might bear his presence. As Isaiah said, people have come from afar "to the honour of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor"...and "to adorn the place of my sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of my feet." As John wrote in the Revelation, like the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven "prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" so has been this church, this sanctuary, this congregation throughout its years. There have been tough times and years that have been sparse and conflict, but God has remained steadfastly loving and faithful to and through Claude Church for all its 166 years. The way the Triune God of grace has been so faithful to this congregation really is quite beautiful. No wonder when people see this sanctuary the word they use most to describe it is "beautiful."

Well, you've probably noticed that beauty appears to be the theme for the day. As you know I've been working through a sermon series about things that will endure into the New Creation; the time when God makes all things new, the time when sin and death are no more, the time when the knowing of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. I've said that what we do to bring about forgiveness and justice, our acts of love or mercy, our proclaiming of the Gospel, and our worship are not in vain and that they will somehow endure into the New Creation and be perfected. So it is with what we do to bring about beauty. Let me talk a bit about the way things will be and how our efforts towards beauty will endure into the new day.

First, the part of the church that talks the most about the end times usually make a big point of saying that there will be a great cataclysmic destruction of everything. There is a very popular series of movies, the *Left Behind* series, which proclaims that when Jesus returns all "true" Christians will be raptured and taken away to some place called Heaven while everything left behind goes to Hell in self-destruction. That's an oversimplification and I will admit to never having watched any of those movies and one could say I'm being delinquent as a minister to dismiss them so outright. They are quite popular in certain segments of the church. Unfortunately, they are quite wrong and sadly, trying to show a Left-behinder what the Bible really says is like convincing a friend that the earth revolves around the sun while they whole-heartedly persist that the sun revolves around the earth because everyday they watch the sun come up, pass overhead, and go down. The Hebrews who wrote the Bible believed that God created everything and called it good. Therefore, God won't destroy his good creation. God will perfect it. All wickedness is what gets taken away. Idolatry will be what humanity leaves and as Jesus said, the meek will inherit the earth, an earth that is full of the knowing of God, and we will leave our idols behind.

The *Left Behind* movies want those who watch them to ask the question, "what will happen to me if Jesus came back today? Would I be raptured off to glory or would I be left behind in a Godless hell?" Oddly, that's not what has preoccupied my thinking on the matter. I ask the question, "What will happen to houses?" The Left-behinder would say "what does it matter, God's made a house for you in heaven. It's made of fine Italian marble and instead of a banjo you'll play the harp." Yet, if we take what the Bible says seriously, when Jesus returns our houses will remain and we will continue to live in them and I will continue to play the banjo because its beautiful. What will change is that it will become a no brainer that everybody should live in houses just as nice and all of humanity will mobilize to build safe and healthy housing for everybody on earth.

We may also ask the question, "what will happen to Claude church with all its beauty when Jesus returns?" You're typical Left-behinder would say, "Who cares. In heaven we won't need churches. The

whole place is a church.” Yet, I think the Bible gives the impression that if this physical church is still standing when Jesus returns, it will still be a house of worship and its beauty will shine ever brighter and clearer because it will without a doubt be filled with the knowing of God. The big change will be that it will be full of worshippers.

We may also ask, “What about all things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small? What about the Creation? Will there still be Fall in the New Creation?” I’m inclined to say, “Of course, the Creation is very good, very beautiful.” The one thing that will change is that it will suddenly become a no brainer that we human’s need to stop exploiting the Creation for profit and we will live more in harmony with it. After all, the whole Creation will be full of the knowing or knowability of God (Is. 11:9).

All that is beautiful will persist and be perfected in the New Creation. Turning to Paul there in Philippians 4:8: all that is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and praiseworthy will endure and be perfected. All futility, death, sin, idolatry, and godlessness is what will be no more. Therefore, dwell on, work for what is beautiful. But, like good lawyers we have to ask, “What is Beauty?”

In the Gospels there is a story of a woman, probably Mary Magdalene, who comes to Jesus on the day before his arrest while they were at dinner. She had a jar of perfume worth a year’s wages. She broke the jar and poured on Jesus. The disciples became indignant towards her and chastised her for not selling the perfume and giving the money to the poor. Jesus told them to leave her alone because she had done a beautiful thing (Mk 14:6 NIV). He told them you will always have poor people to take care of (and you better), but you will not always have me. She has anointed my body for burial beforehand (because you are all going to desert me and won’t be there to bury me.” So what makes something beautiful? Well, beauty isn’t about appearances, it is about extravagantly wasting your life on doing that which very personally tells the people around you that they are loved. The presence of God will be in you. And there will be beauty. It is beautiful to forgive. It is beautiful to do justice. It is beautiful to do mercy. It is beautiful to worship. It is beautiful to proclaim that in, through, and as Jesus Christ God has redeemed his Creation and he is coming to make everything new. Go and be beautiful people. Amen.