

Genesis 29:15-30

Then Laban said to Jacob, ‘Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?’ Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah’s eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, ‘I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.’ Laban said, ‘It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.’ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, ‘Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.’ So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, ‘What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?’ Laban said, ‘This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me for another seven years.’ Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. (Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban for another seven years.

Song of Solomon 4:1-7

How beautiful you are, my love, how very beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved. Your lips are like a crimson thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. Your neck is like the tower of David, built in courses; on it hang a thousand bucklers, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will hasten to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you.

“Shrek—More Than a Monster”

Rev. Charles Schuster

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I'm guessing that there has never been a sermon preached on those two texts in this church. I do want to warn you that the end of this sermon is weird. I know that. They do this every year at this time. It's so shallow, so transparently superficial. I don't know why they do it. I mean, you subscribe every week, stories from the world of sports, but February it happens, so shallow. Men look for it, and it happened last week. *Sports Illustrated* mailed out their swimsuit edition. Now, for those who have never seen the swimsuit edition of *Sports Illustrated*, let me say that there is little about sports in this particular tabloid, and mostly what is illustrated isn't really swimsuits, because there isn't

much involved of suits for swimming, I observe. I heard a country western song this week where some guy is singing to some girl, saying, "I'd like to see the other half of your butterfly tattoo. Well, if those women in the swimsuit edition of *Sports Illustrated* had butterfly tattoos, you'd get to see the other half, and more. So it caused me to ponder on a number of things about the people depicted in the pictures. I don't think any of those women were Methodist hierarchy, DS's or bishops, don't recognize any episcopal leaders in those photos. There's a good chance that none of them are Methodists, at least not in any church where I've ever been. And that edition of *Sports Illustrated* didn't make me think about Jesus, but it did make me think about the Bible. Part of the Bible, the Song of Solomon.

We don't know who wrote it. Some say Solomon wrote it. Scholars don't think that's true. Maybe it was a wedding poem or fragments of wedding poems. But what makes someone say, "Your eyes are like doves behind your veil," or "Your hair is like a flock of goats moving down a hill"? What a line. And "Your teeth are like a flock of sheep that have been dipped." That's what it says. "And your cheeks are like pomegranates, and your neck is like a tower of David fit for battle. Your breasts..." you know, I'd like to see the other half of your butterfly tattoo. I thought of beauty. The *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition came this week, and I thought of beauty. Some people are not beautiful. Some people are ugly, but you have to get to know them.

That's why the movie *Shrek*, a great movie, an example of how important it is to see beyond the monstrous exterior to the beauty inside, a parable for children and adults, a wonderful way to help us look for the beauty by getting to know someone. And that story of Jacob, Laban had two daughters, Leah and Rachel, and the text said --well, there's struggle with how this could be translated, the way Rebecca read it. Leah had beautiful eyes. That's like saying "She has a nice personality." Some texts translate that "She had crooked eyes." The Hebrew word is impossible. But the translation is very clear. Leah was ugly. In fact, the word Leah means "cow."

So Jacob wakes up after the wedding, thinking he has married beautiful Rachel, only to discover the wrong sister. He has married the cow. Weak-eyed, cross-eyed, drop-dead unattractive Leah. Wouldn't be the first man or woman who was surprised after the wedding at what they got. But that's another sermon. She was ugly, until he got to know her. You can't see beauty even in a picture-perfect portrait because beauty is deeper than eye-shadow, deeper than cosmetic cover-up, deeper than how it looks. It is how it is that matters.

A woman saw a homeless man sitting on the curb in front of a cafeteria. She asked him if he was hungry. She told him she wanted to give him a meal. She was well-dressed, in a business suit, new coat, one of the beautiful people. He was, on the other hand, dirty and unshaven and had holes in his shoes and torn blue jeans and a sweat shirt and he didn't smell good, and she took his hand. He said, "What are you doing, lady?" She said, "I'm helping you up." A police officer came by. "Is he causing you trouble, ma'am?" "No, I'm trying to get him into the cafeteria. He needs to eat. Could you help me, officer?" Well, they got him into the diner. The manager came up and said, "I don't want him in here."

She said, "I'm the president of the company up the street. Lots of people from our company come here for lunch. Do you want us to find another cafeteria?" The manager said, "Let me take you to a table."

His name was Old Jack. He ate that meal as if he hadn't eaten for a long, long time, which he hadn't. Her name was Penelope. She was president of the company up the street. She looked at this homeless man and she said to him, "Jack, do you remember me? I'm a little older now. I looked a little different. Do you remember me? I came in the door of this place years ago. I was cold and hungry and just out of college, I came to the city looking for a job. I was down to my last few cents. I had been kicked out of my apartment. I was walking the streets, it was February, it was cold and stormy, and I saw this place and I came in the door. I was looking for something to eat. I was hoping you'd give it to me. And there you were behind the serving counter. I asked you, could you give me some work so I could make some money for a meal. You said it was against company policy, and then you made for me the biggest roast beef sandwich I had ever seen, and you handed me a cup of coffee. You said, "Go over to that side table there." I was afraid you'd get in trouble, then I saw what you took out of your pocket the money for my meal, and put it in the cash register.

I got a job that afternoon. I worked my way up and started my own business. Jack, when you finish your meal, I want you to come to visit with Mr. Lyons. He's the personnel director of my company. I'll let him know you're coming, and he'll find you something to do around the office, and we'll give you some money so you can buy some clothes and a place to live till you get on your feet." Old Jack looked at her and said, "How can I ever thank you?" There were tears in his eyes. The police officer said, "I saw a miracle today, something I will never forget." It's always a miracle, it's always beautiful when we get to know someone and see the beauty inside them. That quiet old man down the street has a history nobody knows because nobody asked him. That homely-looking woman who lives by herself had a dream once. She thought maybe she could write a novel, but so many rejection letters, she's now convinced she has no talent. That angry teenager who sits at the table in silence and scowls at the world, just trying to find some way to participate. Ugly people are beautiful people when we get to know them.

The *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition came out this week, and I've been thinking about beauty, then I realized it's hard to see beauty in some people because of their past. To see beauty in some people we've got to forgive them. This weekend our thoughts turn to presidents Lincoln and Washington. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated while watching a play at Ford Theater. John Parker was hired to guard him, but John Parker left his post, allowing John Wilkes Booth easy access to the presidential box, and Abraham Lincoln last words to Mary Todd Lincoln, as they sat there in the theater, he said, "I want to visit the Holy Land some day. I want to go see those places, those hallowed places where the footprints of the Savior." He said, "There's no city I would much more desire to see than Jerusalem." And with those words half-spoken, the bullet of the assassin entered his brain.

Later, Mary Todd Lincoln said she would never forgive John Parker for allowing that terrible deed to happen. It is reported that their son Robert looked at his mother and said, "Papa would have forgiven him." Abraham Lincoln. Perhaps it was the second most famous speech. It was the speech he gave to the nation to begin his second term, when he said, "With malice toward none and charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work and bind up the nation's wounds." "Papa would have forgiven him."

Once an elderly woman, a fiery patriot, came to see Abraham Lincoln, the president, and was critical of him because of his kindly remarks about his enemies, when she thought he ought to be trying to destroy them. He said, "Why, Madam, do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" We will never see beauty in our adversaries until we forgive them. Jesus knew that. Abraham Lincoln read that in the Bible. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. There's a story going around about Jimmy Baker the televangelist. Caught up in a scandal, fell from the top of the religious world, put on trial for embezzlement, put in prison, disgraced, without friends or family. Tammy Fay divorced him. One friend stayed with him. One friend forgave him. One friend overlooked the ugliness of his past. It was another televangelist, it was Billy Graham. He met Jimmy Baker the day he was let out of prison. He invited him to stay with him. Baker had no money. Billy Graham gave him some. Baker had no wallet. Billy Graham gave him his.

People make mistakes in their lives. People hurt us. Sometimes, they intend to. We will never see the beauty in them until we can forgive them. And Jesus said, not seven times, but seventy times seven times. It was Gandhi who said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth leaves the world blind." And we will be blind to the beauty of the enemy if we forget that the adversary must be forgiven. Someone said, "Every day may not be good, but there is some good in every day." To which we would add, "Every person may not be good, but there is some good in every person." We might want to suggest that some people have their less likeable traits most evident. So we find beauty, we forgive.

Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition came this week, and I've been thinking about beauty. I know we can see beauty in people if we get to know them, and we can see beauty in people if we can forgive them, but most difficult of all is to see beauty in ourselves, and we can see it if we believe it's there. Kahlil Gibran said, "Beauty is life when life unveils her holy face, but you are life, and you are the veil. Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror, but you are eternity and you are the mirror."

Today we have been asked to support Buckhorn Camp, and what goes on at that camp is special and precious. Camp Hope is one of their camps. You know, it's just north of here, where Buckhorn Camp is. Camp Hope is one of those camps they have in the summer for people who are autistic, mentally challenged, and physically handicapped. It's a place where people learn to see the beauty within themselves. Howard is autistic and quiet, but at camp he comes and there's a dance, and he comes alive, and he's a new person. And Milly cannot talk, but at Camp Hope she giggles all week long. And Linda, she uses a walker. She cannot talk, and at Camp Hope you know they have ramps where you can get

almost anywhere in the woods, and you can get down there by the lake. She yells out and bubbles with excitement. Campers treated like normal people, not like people with disabilities. The beauty inside, it's there, and they can see it in themselves, and so can we, if we believe it.

Truthfully, I've never been a fan of Jake Plummer. I thought he was mediocre when he was the Bronco quarterback. I thought some of our choir members could be a better quarterback than Jake Plummer. I really don't think he's a fan of himself. I think there was a time in his life when he could not see the beauty within himself, until his good friend Pat Tillman died. Pat Tillman walked away from a multi-million dollar contract in the NFL to serve in the army, and was killed in Afghanistan by friendly fire. Jake Plummer and Pat Tillman were on the same team. Jake Plummer walked away from an NFL contract also, because he didn't like who he was, and he didn't like the person he was becoming. Pat was his hero, his role model. He spoke at Pat Tillman's funeral. This is what he said:

"I was in the store the other day, I saw *People* magazine. It had on the cover of it 50 beautiful people, and Pat's picture was one of them. What is beauty? Is it a pretty face, a nice smile, flowing hair, nice skin? Not to me, it's not. To me, beauty is living life to a higher standard, stronger morals, and ethics, and believing in them whether people agree with you or not. Beauty is not wasting a day. It is noticing life's little intricacies, taking time out of your busy day to enjoy those intricacies. Beauty is being real, being genuine, being pure with no façade. What you see is what you get. Beauty is expanding your mind. It's always seeking knowledge. It's not being content. It's always going after something. It's challenging yourself. Beauty is within us. But we have to believe it to see it."

It's what Stephanie Germanotta said. Stephanie Germanotta, *Time* magazine said she's one of the most influential celebrities in the world. Forbes magazine put her as number seven on the list of the world's one hundred most powerful women. Stephanie is not the name you would know her by. She's a singer and a songwriter, and she is Lady Gaga. She says, "What we can do is pull out of us the superstar we were supposed to be."

Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror. You are eternity, you are the mirror. Pulling the superstar out of you that you are supposed to be. You and I will never find beauty in other people, and we will have difficulty forgiving those who have been ugly to us, unless we find beauty in ourselves. If we think we are too young, we will never grow mature. If we think we are too old, we may count our wrinkles as burdens rather than tributes to our wisdom. If we think we are not smart, we will forget to think again. If we believe we are ugly, we will act like we are not beautiful, and never evolve.

There are many Christians who believe in the second coming of Christ. It's called the Parousia. I don't know about that, but it seems to me, if Jesus came back, he'd be coming back to tell us, you and I, we are beautiful. Believe it, we are beautiful. No matter how sad we are, he'd say again, blessed are those who mourn. No matter how much we have been hurt by life, he'd say again to us, blessed are those who suffer. No matter how

withdrawn we are, he'd say again, blessed are the meek. Beautiful. We are beautiful. Believe it. Pull out the superstar we were supposed to be.

The *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition came this week, and it made me think of beauty, and I've been thinking of beauty all week. And you know what I did? I took that magazine and I put it in the recycle bin. I threw it away, because those pictures of those pretty and perfect people, that's not beauty. That's superficial, that's exploitation, that's shallow. And you might be able to see the other half of the butterfly tattoo, but beauty is seen when the butterfly flies. Now, that's deep. I think.