

Rebecca Mattern

Psalm 16:7-11

Ephesians 3:14-21

Captivated by Beauty: Made for the Beloved

July 7, 2024

On our presbyterian tradition we pay a lot of attention to learning, investigating, thinking, questioning, engaging our minds in Scripture. This is a wonderful and important perspective - AND we often lose sight of the feeling of God. It is not quantifiable. It makes us uncomfortable, and yet, it is part of the fabric of who we are. So this morning, I invite you to feel these words from the Apostle Paul in

Ephesians 3:14-21, NRSV

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of God's glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through her Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to the One who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

This is the word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God

Our theme this morning is "Made for the Beloved" - it orients our purpose, our identity, toward God. Before we are anything else, we are God's and we are loved.

I wonder, if you were to describe yourself, what you might say first. The child of your parents? The parent of your children? A sister, brother, sibling? A friend? A human? The only time I say “child of God” is when I’m writing a faith statement or at church.

When asked “What do you do?” Our jobs, family responsibilities, and hobbies take center stage. We might say we go to - or work at - church, or we enjoy nature, but we seldom, if ever, say we enjoy or glorify God.

When we gather for worship and spend time in prayer - we are reminded that at the core of who we are - we are God’s beloved and we are made for the Beloved God.

The passage that Siri read from Psalm 16 is one of assurance and confidence in God. It is an idyllic understanding of our relationship with God. Oh, if it were only that easy! To say that nothing can shake us because we are always aware of God’s presence . . . Oh, if only we weren’t so - human - so shakeable, so prone to let society say who we are - lost, unloved, unworthy, failure, rather than living into who God says we are: loved, forgiven, worthy, beautiful.

Our focus on path comes from verse 11:

You show me the path to Life; your presence fills me with joy.

There have been many times along my life journey when I admit I have scoffed at this proclamation. I wonder if the same is true for you. Along our paths we encounter deep potholes of sadness in the wake of losses in our personal lives, creation, and the world. There are times when we are faced with roadblocks everywhere we turn, when the mountains rise before us and we think we’ll never make it over. There are times when we ask God for guidance and it seems as if God is silent. And still, God is there, present with us, calling us back just as the Beloved is with us when the path is smooth and finding beauty and joy are easy.

Julian of Norwich, an English mystic, knew something of this. In May of 1373 she became very ill and thought she was dying. During that time she had visions of Christ. She was healed and went on to write an account of her experience called

Showings - or Revelations of Divine Love,¹ a work that has become a great resource for spiritual life. In it she explores suffering and evil in the face of Divine Love, and acknowledges it is part of being human. Wendy Farley, author of *Beguiled by Beauty* on which our worship series is based, explores Julian of Norwich and claims “What makes this suffering so soul-destroying is that we cannot see how beloved we are. We no longer remember that we are adored and cherished by God.”

Remembering that we are adored and cherished by God is one goal of contemplative practices. Spending time connecting with God in various ways - alone and in community - strengthens the muscles of our minds, and even our bodies, to remember that we are loved by God. Regular and intentional time spent with God in our everyday lives helps us to reflexively connect with the Divine and be reminded of God’s love for us when suffering comes. It better allows us to encounter that of God in ourselves and in others. It allows us to see how we can grow out of our suffering, and again embrace the joy that we have in God through Christ. It reminds us of our primary identity: beloved children made for the Beloved God, the One Who shows us the path to Life; whose presence fills us with joy.

Throughout this worship series we will be engaging different contemplative practices. They may not all work for you, and that is ok. Our hope is that you may find a new practice, or be renewed in a practice, that will guide your time with God in fresh ways. In Paul’s words to the Ephesians: “I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

This morning, we will be practicing Audio Divina. I invite you to close your eyes to remove the distraction of what you see, if you are comfortable. Let the music wash over you - it is about 5 mins long. Once it has stopped, we will spend a moment in silence and I will close us with Paul’s words.

(Chorus of the song: You make beautiful things, you make beautiful things out of dust. You make beautiful things, you make beautiful things out of us)²

¹ <https://www.juliansvoice.com/who-was-julian-of-norwich.html>,

² *Beautiful Things* by Gungor

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