

SUNDAY

Beautiful Things

By Reggie Kidd

Denise comes to church wearing makeup to hide bruises from hands that had once been pledged to love and cherish her. Daniel comes wondering if anyone will notice scars from cosmetic surgery he hopes will slow his late Boomer life down. Jason comes resolving to find the strength to stop overeating. Ellen comes doubting whether Jesus can forgive this week's purging.

Each encased in a cocoon of "felt" ugliness; yet all unknowingly united on the canvas of an incomparable Artist.

The Poetry of Redeemed Humanity

"The king will have pleasure in your beauty," runs a line in the one wedding song that made its way into the Book of Psalms. No telling how many royal brides of Israel "walked the aisle" to this incredible lyric (Ps 45:11 BCP). A greater King-Groom, Jesus, takes even greater pleasure in the beauty of a yet more royal Bride. We are his song of love, for he came to make us "radiant in glory" (my paraphrase of Eph 5:27). We are his poetry, for he came to make us his workmanship (Eph 2:10, Greek: *poiema*, from which "poem" is derived). It's hard to take in, but Jesus' loving design for us is loveliness. He will have pleasure in our beauty—yours, mine, and ours together.

That is worship's new song. And perhaps it's worth thinking about while we're on the subject of artistry in worship and the effective worship leader.

Beautiful Maker

The true art in worship is not ours. It's Jesus', because he doesn't just save us from destruction. Jesus does more for us than getting us out of debtor's prison (though he does), more for us than delivering us from an eternal death penalty (though he does), more for us than preventing us from being devils' food (though he does). He pulls us off the scrap heap and redeems, reworks, remakes, and refashions us into works of art.

lose weight exercise more spend more TIME with Family and Friends
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“You make beautiful things, You make beautiful things out of the dust,” sings Michael Gungor, and that, rightly. In a scene in the *Divine Comedy* Dante describes sculptural reliefs of individuals whose lives are marked by God’s grace (*Purgatorio* 10). The reliefs are “living stone” tableaus of humility: Mary saying “Yes!” to Gabriel, David dancing before the Ark, a Roman emperor showing kindness to a widow. Meanwhile, in the very same scene, redeemed but pride-burdened souls carry back-bending stones—the very same stuff into which the lovely, grace-filled tableaus are carved. The promise for the redeemed is that eventually, in God’s own time, all our lives will tell beautiful stories.

Along the way, we worship. In worship we participate in the beauty that will be complete one day, and that—at least according to the Bible—has already set in.

How He Loves

The “takeaway”? Simply a gospel-beautification inventory. Do our services cover a theological range of Christ as Guilt-bearer, Debt-payer, Dragon-slayer, Beauty-maker? A depth of sacred action: baptismal waters that purify, a kiss that confers peace, bread and wine that foretell a wedding banquet? An affective range of sorrow and joy, penitence and celebration?

For me, though, the most critical question in crafting worship that participates in Jesus’ artistry is whether his interest in Denise and Daniel and Jason and Ellen is also mine.

C. S. Lewis maintains that we are all helping one another to one of only two possible ends: either the Beatific or the Miserific Vision.¹ We are all—every one of us—on our way to being either an “everlasting splendor” or an “immortal horror.”² And in this life we can do nothing more important than take with full earnestness the question of our neighbor’s ultimate destiny.

Healing Arts

One of the reasons for tuning in to the voices of Christian neighbors from other generations is that sometimes their arresting idioms will recapture for us biblical truth. One of the greatest services we as worship leaders can provide our contemporary Christian neighbors is a remediation of these idioms and their healing truths.

The anonymous 1st century Odist sings: “My chains were cut off by His hands.” That’s good news for Denise. “I received the face and form of a new person.” It’s as though those words were penned for Daniel personally. “And I walked in Him and was saved.” Jason and Ellen need to know that. More, we all could use a dose of: “Then I was crowned by my God, and my wreathed-crown is living. . . . I have been released from vanities and am not condemned (*Odes of Solomon* 17:4,1,3). Or, as John Andrew Schreiner elegantly adapts the lyric: “Glory to You, Messiah. Glory to You, our God.”

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song of
Love,
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To learn more about the language of the worship artist and the ability to impart vision and inspire freedom,

READ:

The Earliest Christian Hymnbook:

The Odes of Solomon

James H. Charlesworth, trans.,

(Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009)

Early Christian Rhetoric:

The Language of the Gospel

Amos Niven Wilder,

(Hendrickson Publishers, 1999)

AND LISTEN TO:

The Odes Project – The Odes

of Solomon: The First Christian Hymnal

John Andrew Schreiner, et al.,

(The Odes Project, LLC, 2008)

1. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra: A Novel* (Collier Books, 1944, 1962), 111.

2. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory & Other Addresses* (Eerdmans, 1949, 1965, 1977), 10.