



**Sermons from St. Marks  
United Church of Christ  
New Albany, Indiana**



**The Beauty of God  
Psalm 27  
January 27, 2008  
Rev. Lori Lewis**

The wonderful thing about the Psalms is that they are full of real feelings from real people who lived over 2000 years ago but had fears and worries and joys and insecurities just like we do. In this beautiful Psalm - Psalm 27, the writer begins with expressing his deep trust in God and then goes on to lament his problems and to ask God for help but he ends by making it clear that he knows God will indeed offer the help that he needs.

It's like he's sure but he's not sure that God will help him.

A lot of the Psalms have similar themes to them.

But verse 4 makes this Psalm really stand out. It says "One thing I asked of the Lord, one thing that I will seek after; to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple."

The writer wants to seek God and to behold God's beauty.

We don't always think a lot about beholding God's beauty.

We talk about seeking God, we talk about trying to do the things that God wants us to do, listening to God and trying to please God, but how often do we pray to God to help us seek the Lord so that we can live in the house of the Lord all the days of our life, beholding the beauty of the Lord.

Think about it, our society has defined in so many ways what is beautiful that we don't think of beauty relating to God really.

We live in a world where we're so busy dusting silk flowers that we don't have time to smell the roses, a world where the glitz and glamour of neon lights is so bright that we can't see the stars. We live in a world that tells us that beautiful means a flawless face with no wrinkles, a perfect body with no extra pounds, a wardrobe with matching everything all in designer brands. When a beautiful home is described, it is the things that would put it in a homearama or inside a house beautiful magazine that come to mind, not the beauty of the home that has been created by people who love each other.

What we need is to seek God like the Psalmist so that we can see the beauty of the Lord.

A mother tells the story of one day when her son Jason was young and they were eating breakfast together.

She had an old pair of pants on and a fuzzy old sweater and she wasn't wearing makeup like she normally did. He flashed his baby blues at her over his cereal bowl and said, "Mommy, you look so pretty today."

She said "Honey, why would you say I look pretty today?"

Normally I'm dressed up high heels and all.

And he said, "When you look like that, I know you're going someplace; but when you look like this, I know you're all mine."

Beauty for a child is far deeper than we can imagine.

The beauty of God is far deeper than what we normally think of too.

The Psalmist says "One thing I seek. To live in the presence of the Lord all the days of my life and to behold God's beauty.

God has given us the wonderful gifts of our senses with which we can experience God. Think about it. We can see God's beauty through our eyes.

Where do you see the beauty of God most clearly?

Is it during a sunset? A sunrise? When you stand on the beach and watch the waves roll in and look out across the water that seems to have no end?

Is it at the bottom of a mountain looking up or on the top of a mountain looking down and all around?

Maybe you see God's beauty in the smallest of things like the intricate petals of flowers and the intricate, miniscule design of the veins of a leaf.

Some people see the presence of God in art - art that touches our heart.

Maybe it's seeing the works of Michelangelo or DaVinci's last supper or an unknown artist's watercolor of a landscape.

There is beauty to see that can help us get a glimpse of God's beauty.

We also hear the beauty of God through our ears.

God comes to us through music of all kinds of instruments and all kinds of voices, through traditional, well known pieces and through new not well known music. What are the most beautiful God filled sounds that you have heard - where you are aware of God's beauty? In the cry of a new born baby?

The sound of rushing water in a mountain stream? The words, "I love you."

And the sense of smell is a way to experience God's beauty.

What are the most beautiful fragrances that God has given you?

Imagine the smell of your nose pressed against a rose, a gardenia or a lilac bush, or imagine the smell of your fingers when you pick herbs from your garden.

The smell before and after a rainstorm, the smell of freshly baked cookies in your mother's kitchen. And our sense of taste and touch bring us joy in life and help us experience God's beauty.

The taste when you bite into a fresh apple, the taste of sugar and cinnamon, the taste of berries and citrus and fresh green beans snapping.

And the touches - the touches that are most precious and meaningful to you - the soft skin of a newborn baby? A tender touch by our loved one saying "I love you". A touch by a friend on your shoulder as you grieve.

Each of these give us glimpses of the beauty of God for God uses all of our senses to meet us.

I remember two very simple times that are strongly etched in my memory .

The wonderful thing about experiences of the senses is that we can recall them again and relive those God moments.

One such moment was a couple months ago and the other was 25 years ago.

A couple of months ago I was taking a walk at night and I was using a flashlight and so my eyes were focused on the ground straight ahead. After a very short time of walking I found myself compelled to look up and as I did I looked put my head farther and farther back so that I could take in as much of the incredible sky as possible. I could see more than 1,000 stars perfectly clear - it was awesome and I said to God, this is beautiful and it's here all the time, I just don't always see it.

It was at that moment that I knew I was with God.

The other simple moment happened on a backpacking trip through the White Mountains in New Hampshire 25 years ago. We were hot and tired and thirsty and we came to an open space on the side of the mountain and there water was rushing faster and colder than I had ever seen and felt before. We sat down to drink it up and found ourselves surrounded by wild blueberry bushes. We sat for at least 45 minutes and drank that icy cold mountain spring water and stuffed handfuls

of big plump blueberries into our mouths. The tastes were like nothing else and I have never forgotten that moment when I experienced the gifts of God's beautiful creation more vividly than ever before.

The early Celtic people who lived in the British Isles believed that you could go to certain places to be closer to God. These places have long been called "thin places." I just read about them and I love the concept.

Thin places are geographical locations scattered throughout Ireland and Scotland where a person experiences only a very thin divide between this world and the next.

This Celtic sense of place designated significant natural locations as "holy trees, holy mountains, holy wells." They were fascinated by shorelines where water met the land, by wells where water bubbled up from deep below. When Christianity spread into the British Isles, the Celtic Christians preserved aspects of this ancient folklore for revering thin places.

They broadened the understanding to encompass not only geographical places, but also moments when the holy became visible to the eyes of the human spirit. Thin places, then, took on Christian meaning, where a person is somehow able to encounter a more ancient and eternal reality within the present time.

Maybe you have a particular place that is holy to you in a similar way: the beach you've walked countless times, a place of reunion where God seems always close by and all's right with the world, a mountain vista that has taken you close to the stars and seemingly closer to God, a home church or family cemetery, or even your own yard and garden. Maybe you can go there or maybe you go there by remembering it. Whether it is a place or a moment or a particular event, there are times when we feel especially close to God - thin places where the space between this world and the next seems very thin. There are times in our past that made us feel especially close to God and recalling them can bring about a new thin place too.

I think too that a thin place might be a place we can get to through prayer.

There are certain passages of scripture that are helpful in transporting us to a special place with God in our time. I think the words of Psalm 27 lead us to such a place - a kind of thin place where human and divine meet in a beautiful closeness. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? One thing I seek - to live in the presence of the Lord all the days of my life and to behold his beauty.

Use your God-given senses to behold God's beauty and may they help take you to thin places - places, moments, experiences where you see God's beauty and experience a closeness to God. I'm closing with these words that are asked at the beginning of a Celtic prayer.

Where is my home?

Is it the house where I live, \The garden where I sit in summer,

The country where I roam, \Or the church where I worship?

The place I call home

Is where my heart is at rest.

And my heart is most at rest

When it turns to God in prayer.

So wherever I pray is home."