

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE
FOR ALL SAINTS SMALL GROUPS

“Strange Beauty: Speech” | Rev. Josh Keller | Second Sunday after Epiphany (1/17/2021)

Isaiah 59:21–60:3; 62:2-3

59:21 “And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring,” says the Lord, “from this time forth and forevermore.”

60:1 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ... but the Lord will arise upon you, ... 62:3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

James 3:7-12; 17-18

3:7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Luke 6:43-45

6:43 “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Strange Beauty “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you strange.” – *Flannery O'Connor*

Part 1 of a 4-part sermon series. Isaiah tells us that God is making us into a “royal diadem” with 4 jewels – speech, justice, sexual life & community.

Introduction Consider that pressure does not deform us into something we are not, but rather reveals what we truly are. Diamonds are just carbon, but when carbon is subjected to intense pressure the true beauty of the diamond within is revealed. In the same way, under pressure your faith life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. Contrast this with the common elements of public “apology” that we often hear, “That is not who I am.”

Background

James is drawing a sharp contrast between the way we say we treat God and the way we *actually* treat the image of God in those around us. This reveals deep hypocrisy; something that “ought not to be so”. What would we think about a man who says he loves his wife, but whose house is full of pictures of her that he has defaced? What are his true feelings?

Beautiful speech is peaceable (not seeking to “win” the argument), gentle (not seeking to belittle), “open to reason” (willing to be persuaded; not just listening in order to talk), full of mercy (not condemning), impartial and sincere (loving). And like with the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians, it is God who is fashioning this “royal diadem” in us. These are not criteria for us to have a relationship with Him, but rather evidence that we do have that relationship.

Jesus faced pressure on the cross, which brought forth “strange beauty” as he asked God to “forgive them, for they know not what they do.” The Holy Spirit indwells us, and as we relate to Him, God’s attributes begin to be evident in our lives. We also reveal God’s “strange beauty” in our speech and in the way we relate to others.

Pressure is coming – perhaps even the pressures of martyrdom. Nigeria leads Africa in the number of martyrs for Christ, but also in the number of Christian conversions. As the pressure of persecution increases, the “strange beauty” of returning good for evil attracts many to Christ.

Discuss:

- 1.) What pressures are you facing now in each area of your life? Are those pressures revealing “strange beauty” or deep hypocrisy?
- 2.) What or whom have you been cursing lately? Which image of God have you been secretly defacing?
- 3.) How can you “return good for evil” in the midst of pressure caused by our national political scene? Or perhaps better, by our local political scene?
- 4.) Are you ready to be “strange” by “giving a defense for the hope that is in you”? (1 Peter 3:15)

Conclusion/Application

Think of some unbelieving “neighbors”. Do they see you as “strange”? How can your speech communicate “strange beauty” to them under pressure?

By Bob Donaldson