

"Strange Beauty: Community" | Rev Tim Frickenschmidt | January 24, 2021

Old Testament Reading [Isa 60:1-9](#)

60 ¹ Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and His glory will be seen upon you.
³ And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.
⁴ Lift up your eyes all around, and see;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from afar,
and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.
⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and exult,
because the abundance of the sea shall be turned
to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
⁶ A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall bring good news, the praises of
the LORD.
⁷ All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you;
the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you;
they shall come up with acceptance on My altar,
and I will beautify My beautiful house.
⁸ Who are these that fly like a cloud,
and like doves to their windows?
⁹ For the coastlands shall hope for Me,
the ships of Tarshish first,
to bring your children from afar,
their silver and gold with them,
for the name of the LORD your God,
and for the Holy One of Israel,
because He has made you beautiful.

Epistle Reading [Acts 2:40-47](#)

2 ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness
and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save
yourselves from this crooked generation." ⁴¹ So
those who received his word were baptized,
and there were added that day about three
thousand souls.
⁴² And they devoted themselves to the
apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the
breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And
awe came upon every soul, and many wonders
and signs were being done through the
apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together
and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were
selling their possessions and belongings and
distributing the proceeds to all, as any had
need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the
temple together and breaking bread in their
homes, they received their food with glad and
generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor
with all the people. And the Lord added to their
number day by day those who were being saved.

Gospel Reading [Matt 5:14-16, 7:24-27](#)

5 ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a
hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp
and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it
gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way,
let your light shine before others, so that they may
see your good works and give glory to your Father
who is in heaven. ...
7 ²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of Mine
and does them will be like a wise man who built
his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the
floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that
house, but it did not fall, because it had been
founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears
these words of Mine and does not do them will be
like a foolish man who built his house on the
sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and
the winds blew and beat against that house, and it
fell, and great was the fall of it."

Introduction

Isaiah speaks of how God will make Israel/Christianity beautiful. One of the aspects of Christian life which is strangely/uniquely beautiful is Christian community. Two points on why/how Christian community is strangely beautiful: (1) An Image and (2) The Dynamic.

Background

1. An Image of Christian Community.

- Our Gospel reading follows The Beatitudes ([Matt 5:3-12](#)), which describe Christian qualities and promise blessings; Matt 5:14 then proclaims that followers of Christ are the light of the world; **The Image is a city** set on a hill that cannot be hidden.
- Jesus talks of a city because he knows that Christians cannot live lives of faith and follow Him, and be the light of the world on their own; they must be part of a city of followers. If they're isolated, it'll be like building their houses on sand (Matt 7:26).
- In our paradigm passage for Epiphany ([Matt 2](#)), King Herod is a picture of humanity under the power of sin; part of what we see sin do to Herod is to make him alone. Sin privatizes lives that God meant to be shared/communal. Some say they don't need to attend church, that they can have faith and worship God by themselves. Maybe, but it is more likely that the waves/wind just haven't hit their houses yet.
- Christian community is more than fellowship: it is the unique, all-encompassing way we live out all aspects of our lives in deep, abiding friendship with other Christians.
- Peter says Christians are a holy nation ([1 Peter 2:9](#)). Christianity is an alternative culture within a culture; being Christian means that we are so changed that we are critically distanced from our original culture ([Tim Keller](#)); we are a holy culture.

2. The Dynamic of Christian Community.

- The Dynamic involves **day-by-day activities, together** (attending the temple; and receiving food with glad/generous hearts (Acts 2:46)). The Christian community is a fully-orbed community encompassing spiritual, relational, and physical needs.
- One critical piece is the routine/rhythm to their days, weeks and lives, together (Acts 2:42): **Apostles teaching, Fellowship, Breaking of Bread and The Prayers**. It's the most basic, fundamental form of Christian community.
- [James K. A. Smith](#) has said most modern Christians need to recovery the spiritual significance and the power of habit, because what we give ourselves over to, day by day, habituates our hearts. Our habits carve paths in our hearts that lead us to what we love most; and we can't help living for what we love most: childrens' grades; job performance; finances. Instead, we should audit the time we spend concerned with these things, so we can live in the way of Acts 2:46, with glad and generous hearts, by spending more time in the dynamic of Christian community.
- Earlier today, Josh prayed for our marriages. If you have been unfaithful, are you wondering how did I become this person? It's because you gave yourself over to temptation, little-by-little, day-by-day, and now your habituated heart loves that most. But, often we don't really love what we think we love. Would you want to reveal what you really loved, to yourself and everyone else? (e.g., [Stalker](#)). Because Jesus did, by going to the cross He revealed exactly what He loved most: He revealed He loved His Father God and us; He loved His neighbors as Himself.
- We are a part of what God loves most; that can change our hearts and make us beautiful. He came to beautify His beautiful house ([Isa 60:7](#)) and we are that house.

Discuss

- What is our primary city/community? Austin, Politics, Culture, Music/TV, Church?
- Do we have critical distance from the secular culture around us? How?
- What are our daily, weekly routines; what/who do they involve?
- Would we want what we really love to be revealed, to ourselves, to others?
- How is Christian community strangely and uniquely beautiful?

Conclusion/Application

- Our routines, rhythms and rituals already reveal what we want most; and in large part they determine what we want most: immersion into practices, repeatedly, grooves our hearts. What are those repeated routines to which we give our hearts?
- Our routines, rhythms and rituals come from our primary community. As a church, we have ten **Spiritual Formation Practices**. Incorporating them into our daily lives can help habituate our hearts to love our Lord Jesus with all our hearts and help us learn to love our neighbors as ourselves; our goal is to have you join us in that. We can't be a city without you; if the world sees Jesus shining His light through us, they will come.