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For five weeks we have been “Beguiled by Beauty” as we’ve contemplated the beauty around us.

- The prophet Ezekiel began our contemplative focus on beautiful trees, with a warning that those who become arrogant can be toppled over like trees in a storm.
- The following week, Psalm 16 invited us to sense beauty even in chaos, for God wraps us in a blanket of safety.
- Psalm 147 reassured us on our third week that God heals the brokenhearted as we remember that our world is both beautiful and broken, reflected in the Japanese word *wabi-sabi*.
- The fourth week Psalm 135 invited us to look for the beauty in creation,
- and last week the Song of Songs suggested we affirm the beauty of our bodies.

And now, we come to our final week of searching for beauty, a journey that has suggested we spend time in contemplation, in quiet reflection of the beauty in God’s world.

How has that gone for you? Some may have found it difficult to still quietly in contemplation, while others may have discovered the ability to be contemplative while working in the garden or taking a walk. Others may have felt restless in the quietness, feeling anxious, believing they need to do something active, while others may have found comfort during COVID-19 by focusing quietly on God.

A life of contemplation takes practice, with times of success and times of frustration, times when we find the quiet comforting, along with those times when we feel fidgety.

Living a life of contemplation does not mean we sit by and do nothing, however, for our moments of quiet reflection often prompt us to respond to the injustices of the world.

African-American Mennonite civil rights leader Rosemarie Freney Harding had a deep spiritual life, one grounded in beauty and joy. She wrote:

“As I think about my family I ask myself, ‘What helped them survive? What was it that gave them the capacity to navigate their way through so many obstacles?’ It had something to do, I’m sure, with knowing they were of great value. No matter what messages we got from the outside world, someone at home was always telling us how beautiful we were, how intelligent, how talented.”¹

What wonderful messages to hear as a child: you’re beautiful, smart, and gifted. What if each child in our lives heard those messages from us? Think of one child in your life. What’s one positive thing you could say to her or him later today? What good news could you proclaim?

In a sense, that’s what the prophet Isaiah suggested when he proclaimed:

*How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of one who brings good news—
who announces peace,
and brings news of happy things,
and proclaims deliverance.*

Isaiah was speaking to those who had been living in Exile, those who had been carried away from their homes to live in land that was not their home. The prophet brought words of comfort and hope, suggesting that God could bring something new out of the chaos. In the midst of their broken lives, Isaiah offered a beautiful picture of what God was doing behind the scenes.

Imagine your beautiful feet resting upon a mountain, preparing to take good news to your family or community. What good words might those feet carry?

“I don’t know where to go,” one might object. “And even if I did, I don’t know what to say when I get there. Look here, feet, you’ll just have to stand still, for I don’t really want to go anywhere.” Have you ever felt a bit shy about following your feet to take someone good news? About sharing your faith?

Maybe you’ve even felt inadequate, wondering if your feet are beautiful enough to bring good news. “Will my shoes get me there safely? What will I say when I arrive? Are my feet able to carry me there?”

One proud grandmother was sitting in church with her five-year-old granddaughter. Noticing something wrong about the little girl's feet, the grandmother corrected gently, "Honey, you've got your shoes on the wrong feet."

The child looked down and then sadly stated, "But, Grandma, these are the only feet I've got!"²

God has given you the only feet you have.

They're not the wrong feet, they are your beautiful feet, the ones that the prophet Isaiah suggested you could use to bring good news about happy things and to announce peace.

Your beautiful feet are especially important in the strange times that we now find ourselves. As the coronavirus continues to claim more lives and spread across our nation and the world, we need some good news. When our African-American friends and neighbors remind us that the world has felt unsafe for a very long time, your feet might be able to bring them some good news.

Sometimes our feet may get lost and may even deliver the wrong news, as was the case with army

veteran Christopher Buckley. He developed racist ideas during his difficult childhood, for he was taught to hate others different from himself. After serving in the Army, he returned home and became a national security leader in the Ku Klux Klan. When he encountered a friend who had escaped a life of hating others and learned how to treat others with kindness instead, new seeds were planted for Chris' life to change as well. This new friend was a member of Parents for Peace, a group with the mission of "empowering families, friends, and communities to prevent radicalization, violence, and extremism."³ Instead of hating others, Chris began to understand them. During an interview, a reporter noted that, Chris "was able to get rid of the hate that was in his heart by understanding the people he once despised were just like him."⁴

His feet had been lost for many years, but he now uses his beautiful feet to take a message of kindness. He uses the struggles of his life to discern the trauma that may have sparked hateful attitudes

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in others, and he helps them overcome their biases to become kinder people.

I invite you to use your feet to take a message of compassion into the world. Even if you're unsure what to say, trust that your words can bring hope. As civil rights leader Howard Thurman said, "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."⁵

It's through the practice of contemplation, of taking time to experience God's presence, that you and I become alive. And when you become alive, use your beautiful feet to take a message of hope and compassion into the world.

¹ Rosemarie Freeney Harding and Rachel Harding, *Remnants: Memoir of Spirit, Activism and Mothering* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 69.

² Hodgins, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #952, adapted.

³ www.parents4peace.org/about

⁴ www.goodnewsnetwork.org/since-leaving-kkk-veteran-spreads-compassion/

⁵ Howard Thurman quoted in Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroads, 1997).