



### Golden Verse

*“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”* I Corinthians 12:27

*The mind of a writer can be a truly terrifying thing. Isolated, neurotic, caffeine-addled, crippled by procrastination, consumed by feelings of panic, self-loathing, and soul-crushing inadequacy. And that’s on a good day. – Robert De Niro*

Mr. De Niro is right, and it is devastating, and not just writers. There are so many messages society sends telling us we are not good enough. We are not smart enough, thin enough, rich enough, successful enough, and it is so insidious because even if you make some headway, you still see others that are in front of you. Then suddenly we are like that gerbil in the wheel, spinning hard and getting nowhere, and only feeling tired as a result.

Over time many are driven into a constant struggle of self-worth. For teens, especially teenage girls, it has become a crisis.

The CDC recently issued an alarming report that should send alarm bells everywhere. Our youth are in a crisis. Three in five teen age girls feel persistently sad, driven by an unprecedented level of hopeless and suicidal thoughts. Though they are the most affected, it has spread to all sectors of society.

This despair is driven by a relentless assault on people’s self-image. We are incessantly told that we are deficient and of little worth.

This insidious message is driven by social media, marketing, and even within Christianity itself. Our feelings of insecurity are preyed upon by preachers, and the billion-dollar industry of glamour, physical fitness, and self-improvement.

As a result, people walk through life feeling inadequate, awkward, and in a word ugly, in body, mind, and spirit.

But Christianity has a shocking claim, “You are the body of Christ.” And this morning we will explore how this simple truth means that in the eyes of God both within and without, the Lord says to you, as Joe Cocker sang, *“You are so beautiful to me.”*

And it is because of the beauty of our Lord. Throughout history there has been a fascination with Jesus’ looks and we find an evolution of paintings that attempt to convey His likeness.

In the early centuries after His death paintings reflected that of other heroic figures, conveying Jesus’ beauty was found in His kingly presence. “[There is a painting

of Jesus] *wearing a toga along with other attributes of emperors.*"

Other painting saw His body as one filled with strength and power, *"The theologian Richard Viladesau argues that the mature bearded Christ, with long hair ... combines characteristics of the Greek god Zeus and the Old Testament figure Samson, among others."*

Still more believed Jesus' beauty could be captured in a perpetually youthful radiant look, *"Probably the most popular syncretic image is Christ as the Good Shepherd, a beardless, youthful figure based on pagan representations of Orpheus, Hermes and Apollo."* \*

In the midst of these problematic interpretations Bernard of Clairvaux (13<sup>th</sup> century) wrote a wonderful poem, an excerpt of which has become the beloved hymn "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded". He focuses on different parts of the body of Christ and how they function to convey His love and grace. Listen to this brief section from Bernard's poem:

*Thy lips have often fed me with words  
of truth and love;*

*How doth Thy visage languish that  
once was bright as morn!*

*Now from Thy cheeks has vanished  
their color once so fair;*

*From Thy red lips is banished the  
splendor that was there.*

*Grim death, with cruel rigor, hath  
robbed Thee of Thy life..*

Scripture gives us little to work with. Isaiah 53, *"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."* But the Psalms suggests He was fairer than the children of men. With such scant information the paintings took a turn over the centuries.

Most notably by Albrecht Durer, a 16th century artist most famous for his biblical woodcut prints, reflected a trend in his portrait of Jesus.

*Albrecht Dürer blurred the line between the holy face and his own image in a famous self-portrait of 1500. In this, he posed frontally like an icon, with his beard and luxuriant shoulder-length hair recalling Christ's.*

It is this perspective that we will examine. His painting suggests that Christ is within us through and through and it is that which makes us beautiful.

This beauty is reflected in the creation of our Spirit. We are made with the image of God within us, and our souls are truly beautiful because of it. But this beauty is also found on the outside; there is a profound loveliness in your body. Far from devaluing physical existence God said that it was good, good, good, and very good!

This found its truest expression when our Lord Jesus came to earth in the form of a man, He made the human form sacred, holy, and therefore beautiful.

Not in the way the people on Madison Avenue would have you believe. I noticed I have been accosted more and more lately by the eye makeup vultures who would have me and you believe that wrinkles around the

eyes are less than desirable. But they are a sign of age, of a life lived for years, and that simple fact is beautiful – the gift of many years.

This physical beauty that each of us carry is not judged by height, nor the line of the leg, nor the perimeter of the waist; it is a physical beauty, defined by what the body does, the hands, the feet, the head...all of it.

Like Christ, our bodies are beautiful for what they do. Mark tells us that Jesus took the children in His arms and placed His hands upon them. To think about human hands and all that they can do. Unique in the animal kingdom, their power to manipulate has shaped human history. They can swing a hammer, but they can also delicately touch another, and suddenly they become a conduit of compassion and care. The hand that touches another with grace is beautiful. And Albrecht Durer's woodcut of praying hands is one of the most sublime sacred works of art for how much it conveys with its laser-focused simplicity. Just two hands folded together in prayer, an act of the ages that in drawing together to lightly touch each other just so, suddenly enables us to feel the presence of God.

We will read a text next week that tells us even feet are beautiful, for they take us to where God calls us to go.

Consider the ode to the woman in Proverbs 31. I would guess by Madison Avenue standards she was not attractive, but it is precisely those factors that count against her that are the same signs that God would use to see her beauty.

She diligently cares for her husband and family, and *"she opens her arms to the*

*poor and extends her hands to the needy"* (verse 20). She rises before the sun and works tirelessly throughout the day. But each wrinkle would be a symbol of her devotion, her love, her fortitude.

Our bodies are not simply temporary vessels to get us to the "good place". Throughout history many have thought they are evil. One ancient creation myth believes that humans were made from the blood dropping of a slaughtered evil god, which meant they thought by our very essence we were evil as well, especially our physical selves.

But Jesus Himself tell us that rather than being evil, He is a part of us. *"Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you."* (John 14:19b, 20)

There is a fantastic poem that speaks to this mystery. Known as "St. Patrick's Breastplate" it is attributed to St. Patrick in the 5<sup>th</sup> century who, according to tradition, wrote this prayer for strength to convert the Irish King, Leoghaire.

*Christ with me,  
Christ before me,  
Christ behind me,  
Christ in me,  
Christ beneath me,  
Christ above me,  
Christ on my right,  
Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down,  
Christ when I sit down,*

*Christ when I arise,*

*Christ in the heart of every man who  
thinks of me,*

*Christ in the mouth of everyone who  
speaks of me,*

*Christ in every eye that sees me,*

*Christ in every ear that hears me.*

You are so beautiful to God for to look into  
your face is to see the face of our Lord.

Amen.

[\\*https://sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2020/07/conversation  
white\\_jesus.php#.Y0XS6y8pCfA](https://sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2020/07/conversation_white_jesus.php#.Y0XS6y8pCfA)