

# Il BUONO, il VERO, il BELLO

## Sermon, June 28, 2020

### Organ Rededication Sunday

**Texts: Exodus 31:1-13; Revelation 5:9-14**

"Il Buono, il Brutto, il Cattivo" opened December 15, 1966 in Italy and a year later, December 23, 1967, in the United States. This foreign film was an international hit; see if you recognize this tune: "*(At this point, the organist played a line from the movie's theme, a theme song that rose to the top of the pop music charts in the late sixties)*". "Il Buono, il Brutto, il Cattivo" ... in English, that's "*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*." This Sergio Leone-directed film, a "spaghetti western" ("*spaghetti westerns*" was a term coined by a Spanish journalist for a slew of Italian-directed films about the American West that were actually, for the most part, filmed in Spain ... I'm told the Japanese called them "*Macaroni Westerns*"). This film propelled Clint Eastwood to stardom as Blondie, the taciturn, enigmatic loner ... a character type Eastwood would become known for throughout his acting career. The plot revolved around three gunslingers competing to find a fortune in buried Confederate gold amid the chaos of the Civil War in the New Mexico campaign in 1862. Eastwood's rivals were a ruthless bounty hunter named Angel Eyes portrayed by Lee Van Cleef; Angel Eyes was "the Bad"; he was a ruthlessly cruel and calculating opportunist. The "Ugly" was a Mexican bandit named Tuco Ramirez, portrayed by Eli Wallach.

Well, each and every week in worship we work hard to direct our own production here, a production I'd like to entitle "*Il Buono, il Vero, il Bello*" ... which means "*The Good, the True, and the Beautiful!*" Goodness, Truth and Beauty are three basic elements we try to incorporate into every service of worship. Like legs on a three legged stool, each element is *equally* important; without one of the "legs," the service of worship can fall flat. Goodness, truth and beauty are three grand essentials of quality worship. To quote former Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple: "*To worship is to quicken the conscience by the Holiness (or, the Goodness) of God, to feed the mind with the Truth of God, to purge the imagination by the Beauty of God, to open the heart to the Love of God, to devote the will to the Purpose of God.*" Genuine worship does that ... it awakens our consciences, feeds our minds, and purges our imaginations with a healthy and refreshing dose of divine Beauty, as we open our hearts to God and resolve to follow His will. Worship, like the Christian faith in general, is fundamentally concerned with goodness, truth and beauty.

**First, the Good.** One little problem with the movie "*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*" is that though he was dubbed "good," Eastwood's character was really not all that much better than his opponents ... he is just smarter and shoots faster than the other two, but he's still something of a heartless scoundrel. The standard of "goodness" in this movie is a bit of a low bar. However, in our weekly production of "*Il Buono, il Vero, il Bello*," we have a much higher bar! In God we find the ultimate measure of what is Good, He is the foundation of all that is good; the essence of genuine good. He is concerned with the good, He reveals what's good, and He desires us to *be* good. Every worship service should include a proclamation, an affirmation, a celebration, a recognition of what is genuinely Good, right, wholesome, holy.

**Second, the True.** God incarnate in Jesus Christ made the unequivocal claim, "*I am the Way, The TRUTH, and the Life.*" God IS Truth ... He is reality itself. He is concerned with truth, He reveals truth, He desires us to be truth-full people, and His ways are true ... His ways are not just true "for us", but they are true, period! Every worship service should include a proclamation, an affirmation, a celebration, a recognition of what is genuinely true, God's Truth.

**Third, the Beautiful.** God is the Creator of beauty, the Source of all beauty, the Standard of all beauty ... and God is **honored** by beauty. That's one reason we put on, dress up in, our best when we gather to worship; it's not just to look better than our fellow worshipers, it is that we wish to present ourselves in our clean and ironed and beautiful best because God is honored by beauty ... and also gives the secondary benefit of putting us in the best frame of mind as we show our beautiful God our respect by making ourselves presentable to Him as we worship in His presence. Something of the essence of God Himself can be experienced through the expression and appreciation of beauty. Some of you may remember why I chose such an obscure passage from Exodus for our Old Testament reading. Exodus 31 contains a little-known fact, along with some almost-unpronounceable names: The very first person whom Scripture mentions as being filled with the Holy Spirit is filled for the purpose of *artistic expression*. Bezalel is filled with the Holy Spirit for the express purpose of creative expression, i.e., for the purpose of bringing *beauty* to the center of worship ... for God is honored by beauty.

We may not have a grand cathedral or tabernacle here, but we do have a sanctuary that is bright, clean, well-maintained ... a model of the plain beauty of our New England Puritan heritage. The architecture of this beautiful sanctuary is designed for worship. This is not a gym. We don't shove aside the pews and use this as a multipurpose room. This is not a theatre with multiplex screens, digital technology, special effects, a light show. It's a *sanctuary*. Here in the simple beauty of this sanctuary, we gather to worship God ... and not only do we worship, but here we pledge our lives and love to each other in marriage, we joyfully welcome new family arrivals in baptism, we confirm our young people for their life's journey in the Christian faith, we say our sad, yet hope-filled, farewells to our dearly departed loved ones ... here in this sacred place of elegant beauty designed and maintained to engage us in worship

of the Source of all beauty ... Who is also the Source of all goodness and truth. I've been here now over twenty-three years ... that's a lot of Sundays ... but I've also entered this sanctuary two-three times a day throughout the course of the approximately 1,200 weeks I've been privileged to be your pastor. And still ... just about every time I enter this sanctuary, even during the week, my spirit snaps to attention ... because this is a special, beautiful place.

What is beauty? Beauty is hard to define. You've heard, "*Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.*" Well, there is some truth to that, but that doesn't really explain anything. There is a distinction between simple beauty and complex beauty: On my bedroom dresser mirror I have my daughter Hannah's stick figure drawing of our family which she created when she was four; it's been on that dresser mirror for the last nineteen years, because it is beautiful to me! And I've twice seen the Mona Lisa hanging on the walls of the Louvre in Paris, which has been described as "*the best known, the most visited, the most written about, the most sung about, and the most parodied work of art in the world*" There's simple beauty, there's complex beauty! We have the popular-today-forgotten-tomorrow simple beauty of praise choruses and the *centuries-long* enduring popularity of the complex beauty of the grand hymns. We have the simple beauty of the pop music of the sixties (*including the theme song of "The Good, The Bad and the Ugly"*), and the enduring complex beauty of the grand Baroque masterpieces. The more complex the elements, the more factors being brought into relationship, the more complex the relationships that are being brought into symmetry, the more beautiful things are. True beauty is pleasing not only to the eye, but to the very heart and soul of our being. It was Edgar Allen Poe who wrote, "*Dissonance, discord, chaos ... these things are naturally displeasing to the soul, and harmony pleases, not just the ear, but the soul.*"

*Just a little side commentary in relation to Poe's quote: Rioting and destruction are displeasing to the soul, too ... that is not activity conducive or honoring to a constructive, redeeming, beauty-creating God. As one commentator this week expressed it, a lot of Americans are staying quiet right now, but make no mistake about it ... these countless quiet Americans are deeply disturbed by what is happening across this nation. Know you are not alone. You may think you are; you may keep your views to yourself because when you do express them you are shouted down, ridiculed and/or vilified by noisy voices. But if you're bothered by the chaos and lawlessness of our present version of the French revolution plaguing this nation right now, know millions of Americans are with you. You are not crazy. You are not evil.*

Every time we behold order, proportionality, harmony, relationship, symmetry or symphony in this world, every time we behold beauty, we feel it in the depth of our being and we behold something of God, the Source of Beauty. The most diverse, complex, beautiful thing in the universe is the universe ... the complexity of the parts and elements making up all of reality surpasses the limits of our intelligence and defies our imagination. Is there ultimate disorder, disharmony in the universe? Absolutely not! Where does all that order, harmony, symmetry, proportionality, beauty come from? It comes from the divine Source of all Beauty ... and Truth and Goodness. It is wonderfully appropriate that we made a huge investment to install and maintain in this beautiful sanctuary a high quality, well crafted instrument to produce beautiful music. Of all the fine arts, music is probably the best vehicle for expressing the essence of beauty ... orchestrating, bringing together, all sorts of complex, disparate, diverse elements in concert and relationship and proportionality and symmetry and harmony.

Some of you may remember this, but there are only two times recorded in all of Scripture, two biblical references, about angels singing. (*The Scripture does not say the angels sang at Jesus' birth. When the angels appeared to the shepherds with their message of "Glory to God in the highest, etc.," the text says they were **speaking**, not singing.*) The first is Job 38:7, where God tells Job of the angels' singing at creation. That took place before the Fall, before Adam and Eve sinned. The next reference to angels singing is all the way at the end of the Bible, Revelation 5, our text this morning. John saw many angels, "...numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they **sang**: "Worthy is the Lamb, etc. Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, **singing**..." John sees in this divine vision that one day, after the Lamb completes His work of redemption and restoration, everybody and every thing in heaven and on earth is breaking out in exultant, beautiful song! So angels sang before the Fall of man, before the grand harmony and beauty of God's good creation was shattered by the dissonance, discord and destruction of sin. And the angels will sing again, after God's redemption and restoration through Christ is fully complete ... and all the redeemed will be singing with them! In the meantime, though, it seems the angels do NOT sing. Perhaps they find it hard to sing while things are still so "broken," perhaps this means they will not sing again until all is finally and fully restored, until all is made right. However, all the while they continue to minister with the utter confidence and hope that all *will* be made right.

In a nutshell, this is what the whole biblical drama of redemption is all about: A grand, majestic, mighty, beautiful, good and true Production being re-assembled over the millennia, a chorus is being put together and prepared and trained even as we sit here this morning, a grand cantata of praise and joy and celebration is in the works ... it isn't here yet, but it is coming! Yes, in the meantime, we still live in the fallen-ness of this broken world. But we live in optimistic confidence, knowing that one Day "*Il buono, il vero, il bello*" will prevail! Goodness, Truth and Beauty will be fully and completely restored. And each and every Sunday is a rehearsal ... a poor rehearsal, to be sure, but a hope-filled rehearsal nonetheless ... of that grand cantata to come.

As we prayed earlier, "*Be with Your servants who will use this beautiful instrument to make music for You and Your people, as You prepare us on earth to sing Your praises in heaven, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*" And amen.