

## Dr. Andrew Tripp's Sermon on Beauty

This August we had a special event, the blue moon super moon. Two full moons in a month, and on the night of the super moon my family went for a drive to see the moon outside of the light pollution around our neighborhood. We drove up 146 to 295, down 95 and back home with stops at a few locations to look at this giant and bright moon. There won't be another supermoon blue moon of this nature for another 14 years. I wanted to drink it in.

This past Friday night we went down to the Frosty Drew Observatory for some star gazing. The observatory is right on the coast of Southern Rhode Island so the southern view especially is free of so much of the light pollution that prevents most of us from seeing the Milky Way at night. There was cloud cover ever increasing due to Tropical Storm Ophelia, so the main telescope of the observatory wasn't turned on. However there was a very large telescope on the lawn that let us see the moon as clouds went past it every few moments. Using the telescope we had ephemeral glimpses at the moon with such clarity and magnification that I saw craters in abundance I've only seen in photographs. As we looked to the night sky we could see the summer triangle, but the cloud cover obscured views of the Milky Way. I was disappointed, because we are getting to the tail end of the Summer Milky Way which is brightest since the earth is pointing toward the center of the galaxy these months before we rotate toward a dimmer Winter Milky Way whose vantage is of more rural parts of our galaxy.

In cosmological time a season is nothing, a tiny mote of time in the billions of years of our present universe. The fourteen years between this super moon blue moon and the next is but the blink of an eye in cosmological terms. In human terms it is a significant amount of time, and the event is rare, it is special, its beauty magnified for its fleeting impermanence.

I garden, and in my garden there are spring flowering bulbs, summer flowering perennials mixed with some annuals, along with a fig and a cherry tree. I planted the dwarf cherry the first fall after we bought our home in Providence. It was a small bit of a thing maybe five feet tall. Five years later I don't know if it is a dwarf since it now has to be somewhere between 12 and 15 feet in height. In the spring it now has a fullness of blossoms. The smell of the blossoms are intoxicating, a mix of amaretto, honey, green sap, not overly sweet like apple or pear blossoms. The burst of color from those flowering trees heralds a changing of seasons and the turning of time, but with such fleeting and impermanent beauty that calls on us to be present.

There is a wonderful scene in Alice Walker's classic, *The Color Purple*. In the scene Shug and Celie walk amongst a flowering field and have a conversation about God, love, and beauty.

Shug starts:

*Listen, God love everything you love — and a mess of stuff you don't. But more than anything else, God love admiration.*

*You saying God vain? I ast.*

*Naw, she say. Not vain, just wanting to share a good thing. I think it angers God if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it.*

*What it do when it angry? I ast.*

*Oh, it make something else. People think pleasing God is all God care about. But any fool living in the world can see it always trying to please us back.*

*Yeah? I say.*

*Yeah, she say. It always making little surprises and springing them on us when us least expect.*

*You mean it want to be loved, just like the bible say.*

*Yes, Celie, she say. Everything want to be loved. Us sing and dance, make faces and give flower bouquets, trying to be loved. You ever notice that trees do everything to git attention we do, except walk?*

When we talk about being mindful, you might imagine the meditations we do Sunday morning, noticing our breath, embracing the silence, but if that was all mindfulness was it would not be complete. We are called to be in the moment, to be aware of what is going on around us. This sanctuary is a monument to beauty. The Lafarge windows are examples of an American stained-glass master. The wood carvings demonstrate a quality of craft that is irreplaceable. We sit in history, in beauty, as I hope to provide words that are fitting of this setting. The art that happens in this space on Sunday mornings is profound. Linda and the band provide the vast bulk of live music most of us experience. The visual art in this building and the art of the building itself are far more part of our understanding of beauty than even famous pieces in famous museums.

Unfortunately, we aren't always well and truly here when we are here. Life has a way of pulling us from the present moment. There is laundry to do or dishes to be done, maybe some grocery shopping happening this afternoon. Prep for the coming week needs to happen and we need to return this or that call or this or that email and I heard the best

podcast this week I'm still pondering and NPR had one of their driveway stories and it makes me think in this or that direction and we just aren't here in this time or in this place.

The first time looking at these windows, at this wood, hearing this music, it was special. The second time, the third time, but what about the tenth, the hundredth, the thousandth time, does the beauty fade into the background as another example of fish not realizing the water in which they swim? Have we become so accustomed to this beauty and this majesty, this craftwork and artistry that our minds can bring us to other vistas? We respond with mindfulness.

The beauty of this building has endured the years. The stone, the wood, the glass, they are sturdy materials, but I look to the crack in the Lafarge window and I'm reminded of impermanence. Even a long enduring material will not last forever. In our lifetimes there are shifts and changes and in the lifetimes of generations before and after us there are shifts and changes. Human constructions may outlast individual human lifetimes, but nothing truly lasts forever.

So let's stop for a moment, and take it all in.

Look at these windows, these pews, this woodwork.  
Really look, take it in, drink in their beauty.

It is not beautiful because it is forever, the cracks, the mistakes, the imperfections, they point to the real humanness of the construction. Being mindful is recognizing the beauty in its ephemerality, in its flaws and in its fading glory. There is a style of Japanese artwork called kintsugi, where broken pots, jars, and vases are not thrown away. Instead, the shattered pieces are put back together with a lacquer infused with gold, silver, or platinum so the repaired piece has even greater beauty than the original.

Look at the cracks of the plaster, the repairs needed for the window, these do not mar the beauty of this church, they make the beauty of this church ever more profound. I think of the greys filling out my beard and I do not bemoan the turning of time, I see the beauty of aging manifest on my face. Wrinkles and stretch marks, liver spots, these are not blemishes of a perfect production, these are the unique beauty elements of aging refining us.

Kintsugi is a mindfulness activity. What are the broken pieces that need repair? What in our heart, our mind, our spirit is broken and in need of repair? How can we lovingly regenerate it so it may be even more perfect than before? I am not saying perfect as in functioning completely well. This year when I received my diabetes diagnosis I went on an intense dietary change. Some of you may have noticed there's less of me than there was in May. It came with a hit to my ego since it means my weightlifting has been drastically impacted as

I can't fuel the same training sessions that led to state and regional records, but this body wasn't built only for strength and I can't live in that direction knowing what will happen if I didn't make a course correction. My Dad has been insulin dependent for his diabetes for around fifteen years now, and around the same time I received my diagnosis in the spring he received one of his chronic kidney disease advancement to stage three. He's had to radically change his diet as a result. Something perhaps he should have done twenty years ago when he started on diabetes medication, or fifteen years ago when he started on insulin, but at this point the damage is done so the dietary changes are to prevent further harm instead of reverse what is now irreversible.

Even in our slowly degrading, slowly aging bodies, we become beauty. It is in our breaks and our harms and our pains we are made aware of this flesh that occupies our selfhood. We are most aware of our toes when we stub them - most aware of our skin when it gets a sun burn. We tend to it because it calls out to us bringing us back to our bodies, mindful of their needs, letting us know we aren't just minds lost in thought.

A lifetime seems a long time, but in cosmological terms it is profoundly ephemeral. In human terms it is quite truly everything. Did you take the time to witness our supermoon blue moon this August? Will you observe the solar eclipse this October? Will you mark your life with the fleeting displays of immense cosmological wonder? I hope so. Will we be awake to the beauty of this sanctuary this day and the remaining time our lives have with Unity Church? I hope so. Will we continue as a community making beauty and repairing beauty and having grace for the very many ways even the best construction isn't indestructible or flawless? I hope so. I aim to be present to it all, because I find this place and our community a special kind of beautiful and wonderful.