

“We saw him, but he did not appear beautiful to us.” In 1970 at Princeton University in New Jersey, a group of students in a religious studies class arrived at their classroom for their scheduled test. There was a notification on the classroom door that the test was going to be administered in a **different** classroom on the other side of campus. The students were flustered and began panicking. They **feared** they would not get to their test on time. As they rushed across campus, trying not to be late for their exam, a dirty **beggar** approached each of them, asking them to stop and help him. Every single student, in a rush to get to the test so they could get a good grade and not fail the class, **ignored** the beggar. When all the students arrived at the new classroom on the far side of campus, their professor told them that the beggar had been an actor and that their test for the day was already complete. The test was to see if any of them would demonstrate the **compassion** of Jesus that they had been studying during their course. Every single student had ignored the beggar who was in need and every student had therefore **failed** the exam.

Our culture and society raises us with certain standards and values. We are taught from a very young age, in both explicit and implicit ways, what is **good** and **beautiful** and **important** in life. Those students at Princeton were simply following the values and standards of our world. They were trained to see their expensive education at a prestigious university as **important**. They were taught that passing their tests and getting excellent grades were essential for being **successful** in life. It had been drilled into their heads that it was critical to be on time and **obedient** to the expectations of the institutions they were in. But these esteemed values of the culture blinded the students to what was **actually important** in life, it prevented them from having their minds and eyes opened. They ignored a human being who was in need in favor of getting a good grade. They walked right past what was most **important** because it didn't look **“good”** or **“beautiful”** according to the standards and values of our world. Their very obsession and ambition with getting a good grade in the class prevented the students from **real** learning.

“We saw him, but he did not appear beautiful to us.” Jesus is rejected by our world for the very same reasons that the beggar was ignored by the students rushing to their exam. Jesus does not fit the ideas of **“good”** and **“beautiful”** and **“important”** that we are taught by Civilization. Jesus's appearance is one that we are taught to ignore and reject because it does not fit the values of our world. As the prophet Isaiah said, **“We saw him, but he did not appear beautiful to us. He was rejected by men as being plagued and sick.”** We think it is power and wealth and education that makes someone good and beautiful and important. So when we see Jesus, we think he is sick and twisted. His **poverty** is disgusting to us, his **powerlessness** is disgusting to us. That he would not build a **family** or **career** is disgusting to us. And his humiliating death on a cross, is shameful, pathetic, and disgusting to us above all.

And so when the world sees Jesus, they are shocked by him. As Isaiah says, **“Many will be shocked by you. They will be disgusted by your appearance and your glory.”** Jesus's glory and his appearance make no sense to the world and its nations. As Isaiah says, **“The nations will be stunned by him and rulers will shut their mouths.”** The nations are stunned by Jesus because his words seem **crazy** and **insane** to them. As Isaiah says, **“Who has trusted our message?”** The nations and rulers think they are **good**—they think they are **doing** good in the world. But when the truth is proclaimed, they reject it, they do not trust it. Our world has a completely distorted sense of what is good, beautiful, and important. So when the world sees the truth, sees Jesus, who is the truly good and faithful servant, the world is shocked.

Yet Jesus, as the true servant of the Creator, is not discouraged by this rejection. He faithfully carries the burdens of those who have rejected him. As Isaiah says, **“He carried our selfishness and suffered because of us. We considered him to be in pain, plagued, and harmful. He was traumatized because of our lawlessness and was made sick because of our selfishness.”** The world not only distrusts Jesus, the world **attacks** him. As Isaiah says, **“Like sheep we have all gone astray, every man is led astray by his own way. And the Lord gave his servant over to our selfishness.”** In our selfishness we end up crushing what is truly good. Jesus is a threat to our selfish lives and the very values that undergird the nations, so we attack him. His words seem impractical and irresponsible to us. The world thinks Jesus is evil, demonic, and satanic, because he rejects the values of power and wealth. Jesus does not follow our human made laws and so we reject him as a criminal, a miscreant, a rebel, and a sinner. Jesus's call to **“sell everything you have and give to the poor,”** his call to **“turn the other cheek”** and **“love your enemies,”** are judged to be not only ridiculous, but criminal ideas. The world thinks it is demonic to refuse self-defense, to refuse the storage of wealth for tomorrow.

But even as the world attacks him, Jesus stays true to his heavenly Father and turns the other cheek. He refuses to open his mouth in self-defense. As Isaiah says, **“While being harmed he did not open his mouth, as a sheep before the slaughter he was silent.”** Jesus is crushed by our selfishness and our sickness, even though he does not deserve it. As Isaiah says, **“He was killed by the lawlessness of my people. He practiced no lawlessness and no deceit was in his mouth.”** And in the midst of this, the Creator stands by Jesus—the Creator does not abandon his faithful servant. The Creator stays with Jesus in his faithfulness. The Creator allows Jesus to be crushed, but he raises him from the dead and brings light and life through Jesus's faithfulness. By not resisting us and not meeting us in our selfishness, Jesus, the faithful servant, takes away our selfishness. As Isaiah says, **“My servant will bring righteousness to many and he will take away their selfishness....we were healed through his wounds.”**

“We saw him, but he did not appear beautiful to us.” When the world looks at Jesus, it is disgusted because Jesus is a mirror that reflects our true selves back in our own faces. We are disgusted by Jesus, because we are disgusting. We see Jesus as ugly, because we are ugly. We hate Jesus, because we are hateful. We are violent toward Jesus, because we are violent. It is our **sickness**, not his, that we see when we look at Jesus.

“We saw him, but he did not appear beautiful to us.” When you look upon Jesus, what do you see? When Jesus looks you in the eye and says to you, **“sell everything you have and give to the poor,”** do you cling to that as good and beautiful or do you turn away because those words are disgusting to you? When Jesus looks you in the eye and says to you, **“turn the other cheek”** and **“love your enemies,”** do you cling to that as good and beautiful or do you turn away because those words are disgusting to you? Do you see Jesus's Way of life as **good** and **beautiful** and **important**? Or do you walk right past his words, ignoring them so that you can get to your **job**, get to your **family**, or get to your **classroom** so you can take a test?

“We saw him, but he did not appear beautiful to us.” Don't ignore and miss what is truly **good** and **beautiful** and **important** in life. Jesus has taken **your** selfishness and sickness upon himself. You have gone astray in your selfish ambitions and obsessions in life, but Jesus has come to **find** you. You have crushed him, but he has turned the other cheek for **you**. You have wounded him, but if you cling to him in faith, then you will be **“healed by his wounds.”** Amen.