

Carl Lumma

THE REVELATION OF BEAUTY

Once upon a time, in ancient China, there was a very rich man. This man was so wealthy that he owned all the land for many miles around his house. The people who lived around him farmed his land for him while in return he paid them a small salary. He was very fair, and lent the people money when they were in need. Yet the people disliked him because he was very rich and they were very poor. Most of the people were severely in debt to the man. They got their food by buying some of their harvest back from the man with their salary.

One day the son of a poor townspeople was working in the fields. He was very tired. He looked down and saw his hands. They ached from a hard day's work harvesting rice. He looked up towards the bright sun and saw, blocking its radiant light, the rich man's house. It was huge. Masterfully crafted from stone, it was illuminated as the sun's rays shown out from behind it. The door was lined with beautiful red silk. It sat on a steep hill that was covered with plush, green grass.

None of the townspeople had ever seen the interior of the house, and few had even seen the man who owned it. He did not exist to the townspeople, even those who had seen him. He was merely a presence that all the townspeople could feel very deep in their souls, and it affected them in their everyday lives. Their awe towards the rich man was a hungry amazement at things he had. Every individual felt it; they were worthless. Not one of them could see any beauty in the things around them because of what that house represented. Even the boy felt it.

He said to himself, "Here I am in a field full of rice yet I am about to starve! I look up and see a monument that serves to remind me that not 100 yards from my house lies incredible wealth. Why does the owner withhold that wealth from my family and me and all my neighbors? I must find this man to speak with him."

The boy left the field and walked up the hill on which the house sat. The boy knocked at the door. A servant answered. He had worked under the man all his life, but yet by the look on his face the boy could tell that he felt the same thing all the townspeople felt.

"Why are you here, boy?" the servant asked.

"I am here to discover why your master withholds his wealth

from my family and me, and all of his neighbors," answered the boy.

"You cannot enter this house, boy," the servant said. "You are wet and dirty from your work in the fields." But the owner of the house saw the boy and had overheard his conversation.

"No, let him in. Only a matter of great importance could bring this boy to approach my house and ask to talk with me. Let us hear what he has to say."

The boy entered the house and was amazed. He was surrounded by things of incredible value. The walls and ceiling were covered in purple and red silk. Throughout the house were small tables and cabinets which held fine ceramic vases and statues, outlined in glistening gold and silver. At once the boy realized it and began to speak, "Why do you withhold your wealth from my family and me, and all of my neighbors?"

"The money of which you speak belongs to me. It was given to me by my father. Why should I give it to you?" the man replied.

"What do you need it for? You have all you can eat and drink while your neighbors starve on your porch!" the boy remarked.

"It has brought much happiness into my life," answered the man. "With it I can buy things which I appreciate. All my life I have spent collecting things of extraordinary beauty. Things which I can look upon and say, "How magnificent!" One must have money to acquire these things. I don't know how I would live without these things to wonder at."

"Show me these things," the boy demanded.

Now the man took the boy and showed to him the things which he had collected to wonder at. In one room there was a plain square table. On it rested 10,000 pearls. They were perfectly aligned in rows of 100.

"Look at the beauty," said the man. "This is so simple, yet so wonderful. Look at the way the pearls are lined up in simple symmetry. I appreciate the beauty in the simple. But let me see what you have to say."

"I think this is beautiful," said the boy. "I too appreciate the beauty in the simple. But there is something I know of that is much more beautiful than this." The man said nothing of what he felt at that moment, but he thought to himself, 'What could this boy know of that is more beautiful than this? He must tell me what it is so that by any means I may acquire it.' Then the man took the boy into another room. This one was filled with a small forest of Bonsai trees. Each one was unique.

"Look at the way each tree is so intricate. Look at the way each is unique. I appreciate the

beauty in the complex. But let me see what you have to say," said the man.

"I think this is quite beautiful. I too appreciate the beauty in the complex. But there is something of which I know that is many times more beautiful than this."

Now the man said, "Twice I have showed to you things of extraordinary beauty, yet twice you, a mere peasant boy, say you know of something more beautiful. Tell me what this is so that by any means I may acquire it."

"I will tell you what it is," said the boy. "But you need not acquire it. Save your money. The thing of which I speak is around us now, we need only discover it. Your wealth has blinded you, and poverty my people. The thing of which I speak that has unsurpassed beauty is not the simple or the complex, but the ordinary."

So the boy left. The news of what the boy had said spread over the entire land. The man freely gave out his wealth to the people so that all had plenty to eat, and a place to live. He gave his house and all the things in it to the people. Yet the man did not realize his wealth was gone, as the people did not realize their poverty was relieved. Finally, that ugly unhappiness which had become such a part of the people's lives was gone.