

# **Voices: The church is beautiful to the bridegroom**

June 27, 2018

There's an old church I see when driving on highway 277 between Munday and Wichita Falls, Texas.

Driving north, you can just see the church's rusted roofline and steeple rising from a group of trees that must be on the old church property. Every time I pass, I make a vow to stop one day and take a closer look, but it seems I'm always in a hurry to get home.

So I tell myself, "On the next trip, I'll stop."

## **'God loves the church'**

I find an odd beauty in old, abandoned buildings, and there is something captivating about churches. While there is nothing sacred about any particular location, a church is a set apart place. A place set apart for worship. A place set apart for prayer. A place set apart for experiencing God.

And I don't want to sound mystical, but I think some of that "set apartness" remains — even in churches abandoned, worn down and forgotten.

It reminds me that the church is not a manmade concept; rather, the church was and remains God ordained. God created the church. God gave the church its identity and mission. And, above all, God loves the church. And because God loves the church, the church is beautiful.

This is so important for us to remember.

## **‘There is beauty’**

Many of us know and have seen the dilapidated state of our churches — not physically dilapidated, but broken down because of sin, racial biases, partisanship, infighting or apathy.

We see where the roof has collapsed and where rocks have been thrown through the windows. We know that the lawn hasn’t been mowed in years and that there are probably rodents living in the baptistery.

But beyond the perceived decay, there is beauty.

The church remains the bride of Christ, and the Body of Christ still has Jesus as its head. The same Jesus who is the head of the Body is the same Jesus who raises dead things back to life.

Jesus, the bridegroom of the church, is still preparing the wedding feast because Jesus is deeply in love with his church.

Jesus is not deeply in love with our buildings, he is not deeply in love with our programming and he is not deeply in love with our mission statements. Jesus is deeply in love with the men and women united under his Lordship to be his hands, feet and voice in a lost world.

## **‘We remain beautiful’**

Even as we fix the roof, replace the windows, mow the lawn and flush out the rodents, we must remember that we do it not to gain God’s love, but because we are already the recipients of God’s love.

We are already the Bride of Christ and while, to change metaphors, we may be having a bad hair day, we remain beautiful in the sight of the bridegroom.

So, the next time you pass an old, abandoned and forgotten church, slow down and try to see the beauty that remains despite the rundown outward appearance.

Be reminded that God still sees his church as beautiful. More importantly, the next time you walk into your church, however old or new, big or small, traditional or modern, perfect or imperfect, see it through the eyes of Jesus.

Try to see your church the way the Bridegroom sees it: beautiful and worthy of giving up his life for her.

As churches full of imperfect people, we'll never get it exactly right, but let us also not settle for anything less than what we are: the Bride of Christ.

*Ryan Vanderland is Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Electra TX. He blogs at [ryanvanderland.wordpress.com](http://ryanvanderland.wordpress.com).*