

**Fifth Sunday in Lent****Isaiah 43:16-21****Philippians 3:4b-14****John 12:1-8****April 3, 2022****Pr. Eric L. Murray****Saint Andrew, Franklin**

In the Fall of 2019, Pauline took me to New York City to celebrate my birthday. Since we both love art, we made sure to take in as many museums as possible. Of course, it was to The Met Museum that we devoted the largest part of our time and attention. In particular, we were fascinated by two exhibitions one devoted to the work of Mark Rothko, and in a gallery adjacent to it, an exhibit dedicated to the work of Jackson Pollock.

It was not lost on us that the vastly different art of these two vastly different artists could be compared and contrasted so easily. For Rothko, it is his love and mastery of paint and color which create a sense of stillness and peace in the heart and soul of the beholder.

For Pollock, it's the opposite. There is nothing still or peaceful about his art.

Pollock's action painting technique results in a chaos of paint and color.

and creates a sense of urgency, constant motion and yes, chaos in the heart and soul of the beholder. You may not find this too surprising, but I spent the majority of my time in the Pollock exhibit and Pauline in the Rothko exhibit. Oh, I tried moving between the two galleries, tried viewing the contrasting art, but I just didn't appreciate Rothko's perspective. My eyes couldn't take it in.

In a similar way, that's where the Apostle Paul, begins his story. He too has a particular perspective, and he just doesn't

have eyes to take in any other point of view. And it is no wonder when you consider the way his life had been curated.

In today's second reading from Philippians, Paul gives us a glimpse into his carefully curated point of view: *“circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.”*

**Of course**, Paul only had eyes for a particular perspective. His whole life had been curated to display his own righteousness, and the success he had curated for himself. Paul needed to be shown a different perspective, he needed to look at the world through different eyes. Standing there in the Met Museum I couldn't appreciate Pauline's artistic perspective until, that is, I was given the opportunity to view the art... through her eyes. Seeing Rothko's art from Pauline's perspective I was finally able to see the subtle, sublime beauty inherent in Rothko's art.

In an earlier story of Paul, this one from the Acts of the Apostles, Paul is on the road to Damascus, hunting down and persecuting the disciples of Jesus, when suddenly Paul is blinded by a bright light. In his blindness a voice came to him saying,

“I am Jesus. Why do you persecute me?”

Blinded and, I would imagine, utterly confused, Paul is led to Damascus. It is there through the loving care and healing and discipleship he would come to see in the nascent Christian community found in Damascus, that Paul would be given new eyes to see. Paul had to lose his sight in order to see through someone else's eyes, in order to gain a new perspective.

What Paul had once believed, in his eyes, to be the truth, the true interpretation of reality, once he viewed it through the eyes of the Christ and those who followed the Christ, suddenly he had a new perspective, the whole world looked different to him. And from that new perspective, Paul's life took on a whole new meaning and purpose.

As Paul states, this time from Eugene Pederson's The Message translation:

*"...all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. I've dumped it all in the trash I didn't want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness [the kind] that comes from keeping a list of rules [not] when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ—God's righteousness."*

Suddenly Paul saw everything in a whole new light. What he once believed was righteousness, that is, his efforts, his keeping of the law, his faithfulness, his attempts to earn respect, admiration...love was not anything more than self-righteousness.

But now that he looked at reality with new eyes, he could see that

Faithfulness, Righteousness, Salvation, Life-eternal...Love did not depend upon him.

Rather everything depended upon God. All of it, the beauty and love inherent in real life, the life he was created and meant to live, Paul could only receive with God.

According to Paul, this from a letter attributed to him to the church at Ephesus in God's righteousness God sees us as, and I quote: *'God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it.'*

The 4<sup>th</sup> century teacher St. Gregory of Nyssa echoes this when he wrote [for a human] *the only thing that is worth longing for, having come close to beauty, [is] becoming beautiful him or herself*. To which I would be bold to add *gaining the eyes to see the sublime beauty already inherit in him or herself*.

That is learning to see ourselves the way God chooses to see us as the beautiful work of art God created us to be. And what is even more revealing, when we look out at the world through the eyes of Christ, we discover the perspective changing truth, that God chooses to see the sublime beauty inherent in everyone and everything.

God looks upon God's creation as one worldwide art exhibit. An art exhibit in need of care, YES. But God is a patient, loving artist and God will not stop making God's creative art until everyone is *living the good life as from the beginning [God] had meant us to live it*. That is grace unbounded! That is the gospel perspective which turned Paul around; And that radical, perspective changing reality is the news which is good; news we, as Christians have; news which we must share with the whole world. That's our purpose as we live the good life. In fact, it is what makes the good life good.

Our purpose is not to make ourselves appear beautiful to God in order to win God's approval and love. No, our purpose is to view the world through the eyes of Christ, to trust the God-given beauty inside of us and to share the good news that God's beauty is inherent in everyone else.

As St. Gregory of Nyssa also wrote: GOD CREATES LIFE: LIFE BEHOLDS BEAUTY: BEAUTY BEGETS LOVE: LOVE IS THE LIFE OF GOD. This is how God beholds us. Love beholding Beauty. This is what Paul could finally behold through the eyes of

the Christ. Paul could now perceive “with God.” the beauty and love inherent in real life, the with-God life he was created and meant to live.

Let’s face it, life more often feels like one big Jackson Pollock painting all urgency, constant motion and yes, chaos. But God intends the good life for you. So, this Lent, as you press on toward the new life of Easter, don’t be afraid to dump your old perspectives in the trash. And in their place receive the with-God life, a new way of seeing, the sublime beauty inherent in yourself and everyone and everything Love beholds.

Mark Rothko, No. 61



Jackson Pollock, (1948)  
Silver Over Black, White, Yellow, and Red

