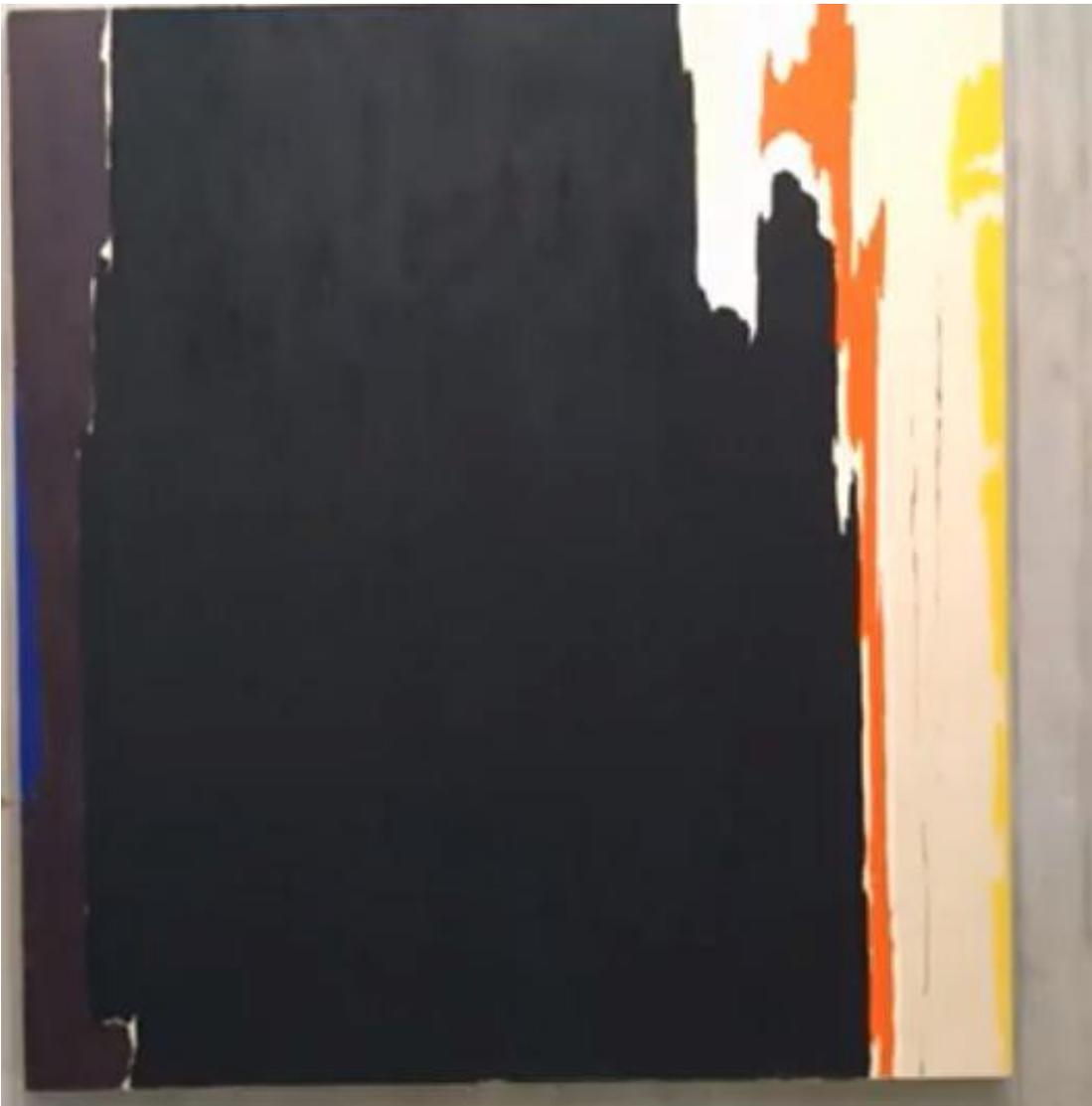


Matthew 15:10-28  
August 16, 2020

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, as you probably know by now, I love art. I love looking at art, especially abstract expressionism. That's my favorite. And we are very fortunate that Denver is the home of the Clyfford Still museum. It's located right next door to the Denver Art Museum.

If you're not familiar with abstract expressionism, I'm going to share with you one of Clyfford Still's pieces, titled PH 812.



This piece was painted in 1951 and is a classic example of abstract expressionism.

What does this painting depict? What do you see when you look at it? Whatever you think is correct. Clyfford Still never told anyone what he was thinking when he painted his abstract expressionism pieces, so that whoever looked at it could interpret it in whatever way.

At one of his exhibitions, a man came up to Clyfford and told him that he had one his painting all figured out, and he proceeded to tell Clyfford what he thought the painting meant. After a long dissertation, Clyfford thanked the man and said, “That tells me a lot more about you than it does my painting.”

The words that come out of our mouths, come from our hearts, and they reveal who we are. Those words do not reveal who another person is, or what another object is. But, those words say everything about us.

A couple weeks ago I attended a virtual tour of the Clyfford Still museum. It was a tour on empathy. This painting, PH 812, was the final painting on the tour.

Everyone was asked what they thought the picture depicted. Most of us had no idea at all. We could speculate, but we weren't sure what it all meant. We could make some guesses, but we'd never know for sure, because Clyfford would never say.

The tour guide then asked us, “What if we looked at others the way we look at this painting?” Not really knowing the whole story. Not being certain what we were looking at. Knowing that what we say about another person really only reveals who we are, not who they are.

<stop sharing painting>

In today's gospel reading, Jesus starts by telling us that it's not the food that goes into our mouths that defiles us, but the words that come out of our mouths that defile.

And then, Jesus and the disciples continue on their journey and come to the border lands where they meet a Canaanite woman. Remember that they are on the border.

Now, let's trace the words that come out of the mouths of the disciples and the words that come out of the mouth of the Canaanite woman.

Canaanite woman – Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.

Disciples – Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.

Canaanite woman – Lord, help me. Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.

So, what can we say about the disciples and the Canaanite woman based on the words that come out of their mouths?

Three times the Canaanite woman calls Jesus Lord, even though she's not Jewish. Three times. Based on the words that come out of her mouth, we can say that she had great faith.

And the disciples? What can we say about them based on the words that come out of their mouths? Impatient. Annoyed. No compassion. Judging. What would you add to that list?

That whole interactions really begs the question, "who is actually possessed?" Is it the small child with a disability, or is it the disciples who have no compassion on a woman who is begging for mercy?

In this interaction, on the border, Jesus is teaching the disciples and us a very important lesson – there is no one outside of God's love – not the foreigner, not the woman, not those possessed by demons. No one is on the other side of God's love and compassion.

The words that come out of our mouths reflect who we are, not who the other person is. So, when we hear those vomit words come out of our mouths against another person, we have to ask ourselves what is going on inside of us. Why do we feel that way?

So, how might we turn our vile words into, "Lord, have mercy" and, "Lord, help me"? How might we turn those words away from judgement about another person and toward God? How might we speak words of faith instead of words of judgement?

That's internal work that each of us has to do on our own. Each of us has to reflect on what's going on inside of us and listen to the words that come out of us, because God loves everyone and no one is outside of God's mercy and compassion. Including us. And thanks be to God the Holy Spirit is in us, healing the wounds that we carry, casting out the demons inside of us, so that we can speak words of faith.

Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected for each and every one of us in order to bring us together, not split us apart. Jesus is always about restoring relationships, not destroying them, so of course he heals the woman's daughter and teaches the disciples to have compassion for outsiders.

In abstract expressionism, the artist will often take a very clear image and make it abstract in order to erase all of our assumptions about it, and turn it away from something we analyze with our minds and turn it into something we that we feel.

So, what if instead of analyzing the people we see, we were just to feel for them? What if we were to erase all of our assumptions about every person we meet and we just acknowledged them as a unique and special piece of art that God has given to the world? Would that change the words that come out of our mouths?

In Christ, all things are possible, including the exorcism of demons.

Thanks be to God. Amen.