



July 17, 2022

Pentecost 6

Luke 10:38-42, 16-20

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The Holy Gospel for this day is from the Gospel according to Luke the 10th chapter, beginning at verse 38:

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing.[a] Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

The Gospel of our Lord.

I would like to center with you on one story today, the Gospel Lesson. It is a familiar story to people of faith: the story of Mary and Martha. Usually it is told, I think too simply, as the story of Martha who is judged for being too busy with work and Mary who is commended for taking time to worship. But the story has many layers that may invite you in this morning. And remember, that stories have a way too of changing shape with the shape of our lives. The Prodigal Son story took a very different shape for me as a father and grandfather than it did when I first listened to it as a child. The Easter story of hope beyond the grave sounded very different to me after my father passed away. So as we settle in front of this story today, take a moment to prayerfully consider your life situation this morning. What is happening around you? In your church. In your family. In your profession. And listen for the word of God this morning emerging new from this sacred story for this time in our lives.

In this moment, let us pray: Creator God, you know each of us. You watch over us from the day of our birth, through all the changes and chances of life, through all the ups and all the downs. Speak to us as we gather this day as human beings, as people of faith, as church. May these words of my mouth and the meditations and imaginations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Strength, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

This Gospel story is taken from the wider narrative of the Gospel According to Luke. The Gospel narrative begins with familiar stories: Jesus' birth to Mary in a stable in Bethlehem; his baptism by John and then Jesus begins his public ministry.

As the narrative follows the ministry of Jesus, there are two broad aspects of his ministry that are striking. First there is Jesus' public ministry: He brings healing to people, healing to their body/mind and spirit. He also brings healing through his teaching. He teaches people about what God is like. When you pray to the Creator God start like this, he says: "Our Father" even more intimately, "Our Papa." He teaches them about what is important in life, and also what isn't as important as we might think. His public ministry brings healing both in acts of healing and in his teachings.

There is a second aspect to Jesus' ministry that is just as important as his public ministry. Jesus calls and equips a faith community. He calls disciples/students/apprentices to follow him. This mission of Jesus is not the ministry of a one-man band. He has come to gather a faith community—that Jesus is still gathering today. That is why we are here this morning.

The gathering of the community takes some time. In the first weeks he calls together "the twelve": Peter, James, John, Thomas and all the rest. Some were fisherman, one was a tax collector. One was Simon the Zealot, a revolutionary.

But the calling of the faith community didn't end with the twelve. On the journey, in chapter 8, hear this, "The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources." Already in this early Gospel, there are women-- Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna—who are part of Jesus' faith community. Later, in Luke 10, Jesus, appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.

Our Gospel text happens in the midst of the narrative of the ministry of Jesus. The text begins: "**Now as they went on their way.**" Who is this "they?" They are the Jesus people. They are Jesus church. They are a collection of the twelve, the women and the 70.

The text continues: "He entered a certain village, where a woman named **Martha** welcomed him into her home"

The narrative does not make clear who all was invited into the room. Who would be welcomed with Jesus in Martha's kitchen? Peter and John? Or the women? Some of the 70? Who is in Martha's kitchen for this story? I think, as we ourselves enter the story, the answer is that the church of every time and place is there in Martha's kitchen. It's a crowded kitchen that day. It's a full house. The twelve, the women and the 70 are there. We are there.. Watching. Wondering. Listening.

Martha welcomes Jesus **under her roof**. I wonder if as the older of two sisters, it is actually Martha's house. That this is literally Martha's kitchen. In any case, she welcomed Jesus into her home. The story may remind you of a story much later in Luke. The day, remember, when Jesus is walking down the road with a crowd all around him, and a little tax collector who can't see for the crowd, climbs a tree to see Jesus, to maybe be seen by Jesus. Remember what Jesus says to Zacchaeus, "Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today." There is something about Jesus in the house that matters in both stories.

Martha welcomed Jesus into their home. I wonder what welcoming Jesus into your home looks like today. Maybe it is saying table grace before a meal. We were taught the very quaint sounding table grace: "Come Lord Jesus be our guest, let these gifts to us be blessed." It is a simple little prayer we were taught as children, but it has stuck somehow in my family. When you think about it, the simple little prayer is a prayer in which we welcome Jesus in to our home, isn't it? Maybe that is why this little prayer is said among so many families in the faith communities.

What does welcoming Jesus into our home look like? Is it reading the Scriptures and meditating on them? Going to church together and bringing those learnings back to our homes? Martha welcomes Jesus into her kitchen. So do we.

The text continues: **Martha had a sister named Mary**. While Mary is usually the one commended in the usual telling of the story, it is not Mary who "welcomed Jesus into her home"—that was Martha. But when Martha invited Jesus into her home, guess what? Her sister Mary met Jesus in Martha's kitchen. That happens a lot, doesn't it?

I think, I'm in the faith community today because a church 100 years ago cared for my grandma and grandpa when they lost their infant child. And so the Gospel was shared from mother and father to children down the line. The way to Jesus is so often through those who have met Jesus before us isn't it? It is not an encounter that usually happens through a logical argument that overwhelms us, or through evidence that cannot be ignored. It usually happens in Martha's kitchen. Author Madeleine L'Engle said, "When it comes down to it, I'm a Christian because of my aunt who lives in Teacup New Jersey." It happened in Martha's kitchen. In relationship with those who love us. Just as it did for Mary.

The text continues: Mary sat at the Lord's feet **and listened to what he was saying**. Mary sat down in Martha's kitchen and was drawn by the teachings of Jesus--profound words, life giving words. Like these: The kingdom of God, the dream of God is like a sower who goes out to sow. Most seed

is lost. But some grows beyond all human expectation. Or this. Do not be anxious about what you are going to eat. Does not God feed the sparrows? Do not be anxious about what you are going to wear. Are not the lilies, who 'neither toil nor spin' clothed wonderfully. Mary was fixed on the Gospel of Jesus. She hung on every word.

The text continues: Martha was "**distracted with many tasks.**" She was setting the table for Jesus in her kitchen. Preparing food. Practicing hospitality—a good thing! Maybe also trying to impress. With Jesus in the house, wouldn't you? Or maybe, just maybe she was trying to be one up on her sister. Sisters and brothers can be like that. Maybe she was fussing anxiously as though somehow this good work would make her worthy of love. A lot of things might have made Martha busy—and very likely she wasn't sure herself what kept her so busy. Does that sound familiar?

Martha, however, is not too busy to notice that she is doing all the work and sister Mary is just sitting there. So Martha comes to Jesus and says, "**Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.**" Now, you might have thought that Martha could have quietly ask her sister to help out, rather than telling someone else about it. But no, Martha takes the so familiar and so destructive indirect route and tells Jesus to tell Mary to help out.

In fact, as you read the text, Martha is mad at Jesus for not already telling Mary to get to work. "Lord, you don't even care." Martha's kitchen can be a complicated place.

The text continues: The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha." I love that piece. "Sidney, Sidney" my mother used to say to me from time to time--and I knew that I was being directed, and I knew that I was being loved. "Martha, Martha" Jesus says to her.

Listen to Jesus' words sounding to the church gathered together in Martha's kitchen: "Martha, Martha; Peter, Peter; Joanna, Joanna **you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.**"

You remember those moments when someone says something or tells a story and silence falls on the room—just for an instant. A moment. There is such a moment of silence for the little church gathered round Jesus in Martha's kitchen, I think.

"Martha, Martha, People of faith, People of faith, **you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.**"

The text, perhaps surprisingly, ends there. There is no explanation by the narrator of 'what does this mean'. Rather we have heard a story that lives on, inviting us in, inviting us into Martha's kitchen.

Peter, James, John, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Suzanna, and the whole church still gather round the story and even now are listening. What does this story say to us in the midst of the events of our lives as this moment in the summer of 2022?

I wonder how it sounds to you in your life. But let me share with you how the story meets me today as a human being and as a part of our faith community.

I do hear the story speaking to me as a human being as summer holidays begin. It has been a busy year. It has been busy both with work and even more with constantly working out how to pivot our work to the latest wave of the pandemic. It has been a thoroughly distracting year. This summer seems to be a time when we may be called to set down the complexities of the last few years. To take some time for quietness again. To do some camping and take time to make a fire and sit by it in silence. To do some work in the quiet of the garden. Fish. Do some reading. Do whatever activity gives you some space to slow down enough to hear God speak. Like Mary did in Martha's kitchen.

I do hear the story speaking too to our faith communities as we gather back to in-person worship after two years of meeting either in limited and constrained gatherings or online. It is so important to gather and take the time to just be still and know that God is God. As we sing the music or listen to the music played. As we open our hands for the bread and wine. As we open our ears to listen to the Word. As we reach out to our companions on the journey.

One more profound image comes to me as a person of faith as I enter into the story this year. When my father passed away many years ago, I was gifted with a very familiar book: his personal Bible. I have to admit, I can't use it. It is in the King James Version. The language, while beautiful, is not my language. On the other hand, this old Bible, its look and feel, speaks to me of Martha's kitchen. The pages have yellowed a bit—some are almost brown with use. It is underlined throughout. There are notes in the margins of texts that were used for this event or that a certain pastor may have used for a sermon. It was the Bible of a life-long farmer, a life-long person of faith. But the most striking thing to me is not the pages or the notes, it is, of all things, the cover. I imagine at one time it was shiny and stiff and new. But after all those years of use, the black leather is soft and supple. The cover spoke of years of taking the time to sit at the feet of Jesus, hanging on every word.

I know. . .there are other stories to be told about the importance of work and service. Many of them. In fact, do you know what story immediately follows the story of Martha's Kitchen in Luke's gospel? The Good Samaritan. But let those stories sound on another day. Today, this week, in the summer of 2022, I would invite you to spend some time in Martha's kitchen. I would invite you to take the time to sit at the feet of Jesus and hang on every word.

As you are this morning.

Amen.