

Sermon – July 17, 2022 – Pentecost 6

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰But 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." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Mary and Martha are the sisters Jesus visits in his morning's Gospel. What do we make of Mary appealing to our Lord? She says her sister has left her with all the work. Mary is sitting at the Lord's feet listening to what he says. Martha wants Jesus to tell Mary to help her. Jesus doesn't do that. He says Mary has chosen the better part.

I was struggling with this account, suspecting there is more to it than Jesus simply taking Mary's side...the side of the contemplative.

Just last week we heard Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in answer to the lawyer's question who is my neighbour...It is a parable of action...being a neighbour is something one does by having compassion, by helping. The Lord ends with 'Go and **do** likewise.' **Do it!** Also a couple of weeks ago we heard of Jesus sending out the disciples two by two...Action once again – hit the roads Jesus says. Travel to other communities, enter peoples' homes. Receive their hospitality if offered and tell them God is near. So surely in this account of Mary and Martha, our Lord is not taking Mary's side only, the side of the contemplative.

In response to my pondering, my friend and colleague reminded me of the Benedictine's motto. It is "**Pray and work!**" It's not either work or contemplation. It's both and. . work is never simply a substitute for prayer. St. Benedict was very clear about this. In his holy Rule, he teaches that nothing should

take precedence over the true work of the monastery which is sacred worship..., the true “Work of God.”

Martha in our Gospel this morning welcomes Jesus into her home. That’s a good start. She is practicing hospitality. But she gets bogged down. Maybe it helps to know that she was following the courtesy code of her time. As hostess, it was her role to provide food for her guest...it was a sign of her respect and courtesy.

She was trying to get together a bountiful table for our Lord. This was the proper thing to do, especially because she knew Jesus was a heavenly guest.

Brian Walsh, a professor I had at the Toronto school of theology, says there is a distinction between ‘entertaining’ and ‘hospitality’. Entertaining is putting on a special effort to receive guests, while hospitality can be seen as an attitude of ‘welcome’ to the visitor and a willingness to invite them in to share our home, our sacred space as we are.

It is many, many years ago since I lived with a group of 10 people on what we called ‘the farm’. We were mostly students or recent grads. We had moved to the country. It was during the time of ‘peace and love’ and ‘back to the land’ and we were trying in some ways to be ‘self sufficient’. We had a big garden. We even had a couple of pigs, hens, even a goat. There was lots of work to do always, whether weeding the garden or preparing low cost meals or harvesting the fruit or putting in the wood for the winter or keeping the wood furnace going.

I used to get extremely frustrated, even angry with those who did not seem to ‘pull their weight’, those who left their dishes unwashed for example or who didn’t work in the garden or failed to put their money in. The tension over such things grew and we were on the brink of splitting up as a community. I was very much in Martha’s camp at the time..righteously indignant about others’ lack of effort.

But then, what would we lose if we separated? What of the camaraderie, the warm feeling as we shared meals, sat around the oil stove in the kitchen (the warmest room in the winter)...the laughs we had, even the sorrows we shared. One couple embodied this mysterious spirit of hospitality. They were always up for an extra person at the dinner table or unexpected visitors. They loved people...they always seemed to have time to shoot the breeze when our older farmer landlord appeared.

They were not driven. They could stop, shift gears and share some time. It felt good being around them. It was like a tonic.

I gradually realized our little community on ‘the farm’ was bound together as much by loving connections as it was by hard work. There was a ‘spirit’ at the farm...very precious and hard to put your finger on. I began to wonder whether the Spirit of our Lord was bound up in it all.

Perhaps this gets close to the heart of today’s Gospel. Jesus is saying to Martha that Mary’s passion for hearing his word is as important as Martha’s passion to serve him. It is not ‘either/or’, it is ‘both/and’.

Just yesterday it took a friend to point out...Mary and Martha had made their way into my day. First I gave out paper bag breakfasts with Denise outside St George’s on Church Street. We poured coffee, handed out bags and clothes...we chatted with the folks. That was right up Martha’s street...serving and doing. But then I came home to write the sermon. As I reflected and wrote...Mary was standing over my shoulder...taking it all in...reflecting...absorbing...wondering. Both activities needed – working and contemplation.

So may we recognize and value the spirit of both Mary the dreamer and Martha the doer in ourselves and others. Amen.

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