

Luke 10:38-42

Our Gospel reading this morning is a familiar scene... that's Jesus with his friends Mary and Martha – Lazarus' sisters – the M&M sisters.

Today Mary chooses to focus on Jesus, rather than fulfilling her duties that her world culturally demanded of her...and Jesus approves!

Think of a party that you throw for someone special - you invite folks, you get the food, clean all week, buy decorations... The day of the party arrives, you check last minute details, clean up and put on the perfect outfit... then the guests arrive. You scramble to keep the food warm, drinks filled, ice buckets ready, jumping to and fro serving all of your guests – meanwhile, so and so YOU FILL IN THE BLANK has spent a good deal doing NOTHING all day but just talking with your guest – you may get very angry and resentful...I would! And by the way when the party is over people like me and Martha generally miss their own parties!

But let's change our point of view (remember agape from last week...a focus on the other – this is all connected)...Let's now focus on our guests point of view.

Who will our guest establish a relationship with...the person who served their drinks or the person who was there present with them? So who sits and listens to Jesus? Who will sit and listen to our Muslim, Black, Gay or Poor neighbors...especially those who are oppressed or at the margins in our very distracted lives...those are the folks that are usually ignored at the expense of our TO DO Lists?

When we meet Jesus day-to-day do we even recognize Her? Do we stop and listen, or are we so preoccupied and distracted by our day to day routines that when Jesus does show up we just go through the motions without really listening, without really ever being “present”... even to those we are closest to?

See either extreme of Mary OR Martha can be a bad thing...what's important in Jesus' message is that we are present to God, especially when God shows up!

Now I want to talk a little about Martha and the nature of hospitality. Hospitality is very, very important in all Middle Eastern cultures. Martha's situation should not be confused with offering hospitality to guests, and it should not be interpreted that Mary's way of being is preferred over Martha's...

The nature of hospitality for which Jesus seeks is realized in being attentive to another's needs **AND** also being present for them (Jesus requires both).

Note that when Martha speaks here she refers to herself only...it's all about her drama! Though she refers to Jesus as "Lord" she is really just focused on getting His assistance for HER agenda and HER plans – she really isn't focused on Jesus at all.

Think of our own Churches - Do we give attention to God's word and serve all God's people or are we led to be worried and distracted by a great many things?

Are we about "Church business" or "God's business"? As you know one can easily get caught up in Church rather than "becoming" or "living" into Church. You know in scriptures Jesus uses the word church once "Ecclesia" it's a call to action it's a verb... not a noun...its' something your participate in, not a building!

Where our heart is (that is LEVAV in Hebrew meaning your thoughts, desires and intentions. What we are focused on in our lives makes all the difference! Do we recognize and listen for God to show up in the needs of others - and when we act - are we the living embodiment of God in the world? Are we The Body of Christ in motion in our communities and to ALL our neighbors?!

And as Martha demonstrates we must also be mindful that acts of service themselves can be very "self-serving". It's very easy to get caught up in the act of serving in a way that really just serves our own egos...the litmus test is what I call the "joy" factor...when one is truly serving with the correct posture and a right heart - there is joy! For as we serve others, in Christ, we come to experience the timeless qualities of – Joy, Peace and Love...the gifts of the Spirit!

Service to Jesus and to others is highlighted throughout all of Luke's Gospel. Hospitality that is anxious and troubled loses its focus. For Martha (and us) we need to refocus on Jesus, and more importantly those Jesus represents for us in the world today.

Martha breaches the rules of hospitality by putting her guest on the spot instead of addressing Mary about her personal concerns. She has focused her frustration not only on her sister, but also put her guest in the middle. She loses sight of Jesus and he gently calls her to refocus...hospitality is not about the food – it's about your relationship with the people you are eating with! SAME HERE (point to altar)!

Martha's problem lies in distraction...not in serving - and her posture in serving is anxiousness and without joy...actually sounds a lot like me!

Notice- Jesus doesn't address Martha as "Busy" Martha but "worried and distracted" Martha! See Jesus knows her heart and where her intentions are focused!

And what's also interesting is that when we are distracted, we can easily miss out not only in being present for those in our lives... but we can also miss being present to our own lives as well!

This is an excerpt from *The Summers Day*, Mary Oliver on prayer and that's next week's topic in next week's gospel...she says:

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I DO know how to pay attention, how to fall down into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

I love that line: Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild, and precious life?

Mary Oliver in this poem is intently watching a grasshopper ... and suggests that showing up and being present in the Holy NOW is prayer...being present is to be in communion with God...being present to all those moments in all of creation that we are connected to and finding joy and peace in it all.

A flower you see today may not be there tomorrow - it is a holy moment for you alone to experience God in.

SEE this story today is not suggesting a right way to be, over a wrong way to be; the story is not reinforcing a Martha/Mary dichotomy...It's not binary...One way OR the other way...it's AND...both!

And we are all invited into living life intentionally NOW in this moment...to be present to your own life and to those whose stories intersect with ours...what a blessing!

Are we listening and are we present to the needs of those who come into our lives each day? Where is our desires and intentions...our hearts?!

Today, even those who should be closest to us are only partially present...even when we are physically in the same room...TV's, video games, iPads, cell phones, etc...how absent and distracted are we from the gift that is our one wild and precious life?

I work in a maze of cubicles where you'll e-mail someone before you'll get up and talk to them – even when they're just 10 feet away!

We create so many barriers in our lives and we often have a hard time hearing and being present for one another. It's easier to read about God's word in a book rather than "being" and "living" the word of God as intended...for it's where our focus is and what's in our hearts that matter most.

Just going through the motions and following the rules doesn't make your heart right. This idea shows up all throughout Luke's Gospel, especially in Jesus' dealings with the Pharisees!

See they kept God's laws with all of their lives (like we heard last week)...yet Jesus knew what was in their hearts...their words and intentions were in their minds... and their service was there to serve themselves and their own salvation...It was less about God and more about them!

After all who needs Jesus to be our savior, when you can just follow a set of rules and save yourself!

The ongoing teaching of Jesus is to focus us on God and on others...and Jesus translates that commandment as focusing on those that come into our lives, especially those considered the "least of these" ...that is, those who have been marginalized or made invisible, or silenced in the world by the current systems of power.

When we gather on Sundays, we move our posture of being worried and distracted by many things, to one where we are in touch with the "one thing needed... the good part that will never be taken away."

Here... when present in this Holy space... we can connect with our source... the very Spirit of God that brings us peace and joy in our lives.

There was a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it would be a long trip, so he packed his suitcase with M&Ms and some water. When he had gone about three blocks, he met an elderly man sitting in the park just feeding some pigeons.

The boy sat down next to him and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink when he noticed that the man looked hungry, so he offered him some M&Ms. The man gratefully accepted them and smiled at boy. His smile was so pleasant that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered him a bottle of water. Again, the man smiled at him. The boy was delighted!

They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, but they never said a word. As it grew dark, the boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave, but before he had gone a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the man, and gave him a hug. The man gave him his biggest smile ever.

When the boy returned home, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on her son's face. She asked him, "What did you do today honey that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had a snack in the park with God." But before his mother could respond, he added "You know what? God's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the elderly man, also radiant with joy, returned to his home. His son was stunned by the look of peace on his father's face and he asked, "Dad, what did you do today that made you so content?" He replied, "You know I ate M&Ms in the park with God." However, before his son responded, he added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected."

(HAVE SOMEONE HAND OUT M&Ms)

May you hold God tightly in your heart, so that you will recognize when he or she shows up.

May you be present for one another...and in the act of participating in another's story come to find that your own story is also made more blessed as well.

And may you find the peace, the love, and the joy that comes with serving God and others with a right spirit, embodying the Living Word of God in our world!

And maybe...just maybe... if you look and listen carefully enough, you can spend some time face to face with God today...Amen.

Your faithful servant,

carmen