

July 18, 2010

Scripture: Luke 10: 38-42

Sermon: "Distracted by many tasks"

I have to tell you that our God has an amazing sense of irony. It was one of those weeks. Lots of phone calls, lots of visits, lots of preparation for various events, lots of lots of things going on. Or I guess you could say...I was distracted by many tasks even to the point that I actually had the thought, "I don't think I have time to write a sermon. I don't think I have the time to "live with the Word of God" this week. I don't think I can fit the word of God in".

Ironic, isn't it? A preacher who doesn't have time for the Word of God? And probably the biggest irony of all, is that this particular text happens to be the chosen lectionary text this week. Ironic, isn't it ?

A preacher being so distracted by many tasks that she doesn't have time for the Word of God, especially when that word is about being distracted by many tasks?

Ironic, isn't it? Ironic, that this isn't the first time that I've preached on this text and I still can't seem to live out its practices. Ironic, that we have all heard sermons on this text, encouraging us to be like Mary, slow down, sit at the feet of Jesus, "feed on God's word", but our lives are so filled with many tasks that we go through the drive through for the fast food version of God's word and we eat it in the car on the way to our next appointment, our next meeting, our next "thing" on our schedule. And we wonder why we are still hungry or thirsty. Ironic isn't it?

So this morning, I invite all of us to once again come to the feet of Jesus and feed on God's word, to get a double portion of God's word of grace, hope and love to nourish us on our life long journeys of faith, to eat on the main course until we are satisfied, to strengthen ourselves for the journey ahead.

For us to do that, we must take a look at this text within its context and see what is really going on around this story. When we do that, We realize that this text is part of a larger narrative that is known as the "travel narrative". Jesus has set his destination towards Jerusalem and the journey to the cross has begun. All along the way, he begins talking and strongly encouraging his disciples and his followers to place their focus on God and God's presence in their life. He does this by talking to them about discipleship and uses examples of hospitality to make his point. He talks to his disciples about the hospitality of towns and how they welcome him. He tells them if the town doesn't welcome you, shake the dust off, and move on. And if they do welcome you, stay and preach. Rely on their hospitality.

And last week, he used the example of hospitality through the parable of the Good Samaritan, challenging his disciples and his followers to recognize that the grace of God, that the love of God calls them to see all as their neighbors and to extend hospitality to all of God's children.

And now today, we have been invited, welcomed, along with Jesus' followers and his disciples into a house that has embraced Jesus as their Lord and we, as readers, learn of another example of hospitality. I will say, that I do get frustrated with this story. It seems that Martha gets a bad

rap. I secretly grumble when I read this story and wonder if Jesus wasn't just a little too hard on Martha. So I challenged myself to look at this text with new eyes this week and I invite you to do the same.

One of the first things is that we assume that Martha is running around preparing a meal, cleaning the house, setting the table but really the text doesn't say anything about that. The word that is used to describe her actions is the Greek word, diakonia, the same word that is the root, for the word, deacons. In church language, we call them the diaconate, which basically means that they are the "hands" of the congregation. In practice, this group is called to be a part of the servant ministry of the congregation.

So really, Martha may have going around feeding the hungry, making blankets for the poor, building house for Habitat. She was part of the servant ministry of the church. She was being the hands of the congregation, a vital part of our calling as disciples here on earth.

The other thing that we need to realize is that Luke wants us to see the overall picture. This is the only Gospel that shares this particular story because Luke is trying to tell us something about Christian life. Last week, Luke told us of a young man who knew the right words of faith but didn't know the true actions of faith and now this week, Luke is showing us that we may know the actions but we don't know the words.

Luke is reminding us that the Christian life is a both/and journey. It is made up of words and deeds and that we must take the time to find the balance for both. Luke does this by having Jesus extend the invitation to Martha to come and sit and listen. As one commentator said [it was as if Jesus was telling Martha and the others] that "if you don't have a vision of what God is doing to repair the whole creation,[if you aren't feed and nourished by God's word], [if you don't open yourself to God's presence through words, then] you can't get up every day and work in it, then you don't have strength for the journey, then you don't have the energy to be the hands and heart of God in this world.

We are on a both/and journey: A journey that is filled with loving our God with all our heart, mind, soul, filled with loving our neighbor as ourselves and filled with being nourished, feed, satisfied by God's word of love, God's word of grace, God's word of grace.

Jesus is inviting Martha to take a step back and to realize that she had gotten so caught up in the process that she had forgotten her purpose of service. Jesus reminds Martha that the purpose of her service is to: love God with all our heart, with all our minds, with all our souls and to love our neighbors as ourselves. And that these words should sustain us, nourish us, reminds of us of why we are doing the things that we are called to do.

When Jesus seems to rebuke Martha, he is actually inviting Martha and all those gathered that morning and this morning to come to the table and feast on the main course: God's word, God's Presence in our lives, God's hope, and the promise of God's Kingdom. This is what sustains us and gives our service meaning because that is what is important. That is what give significance to our actions and our deeds as people of faith. God's word gives our lives meaning and purpose. Jesus is telling Martha, his disciples and us this morning that at the core of our faith, we find

God's word. It is the one thing that will sustain us. It is the one thing that will give us energy for the journey. It is the one thing that never fades away or that can be taken away. It is the one thing that is abiding in this temporary world.

Jesus issues an invitation for Martha to re-evaluate what's important and to realize that she cannot bring about the Kingdom of God on her own. God will do that and what will sustain as she works is God's word. Jesus issues an invitation for Martha and for us to realize that "our occupations and preoccupations have filled up our lives to the brim and they prevent the Spirit of God from breathing freely in us and thus renewing our lives."

Jesus is asking Martha to really hear God's Word, embrace God's word, be nourished by God's word and be satisfied so that when she has been renewed, and refreshed by God's word, then she will be ready to go out and do likewise.

Our journey through our lives, through our faith, through our calling as people of faith is filled with both deeds and God's word. We need a balance of both for us to become the people that God created us to be. In our Scripture today, we hear an invitation, an invitation to both and through Mary and Martha. We hear a reminder that Martha's activism needs Mary's focus to learn contemplation and then go and do while Mary's intense focus invites Martha's service a change to re-evaluate what's really important in life.

We hear a reminder that our journey, our life, our calling as people of faith is about our connection as the Body of Christ. Bottom line: It is all about our relationship with one another. Bottom line: It is all about our connection with one another. Bottom line: It is all about our bond with one another.

By placing the stories of the Good Samaritan and Martha's work side by side, Luke stress that connection, stresses that bond and reminds us of our calling as disciples of Christ. We are in relationship with one another through deed and through word.

Fred Craddock, the noted preachers, likes to use the example that "If we were to ask Jesus which example applies to us, [Mary or Martha] his answer would be yes." The Christian life is a both/and.

The Good News is that we are reminded that "all our efforts and deeds are to be balanced and even nourished by times of doing absolutely nothing but sitting and being with God. That is true Gospel Hospitality which will not allow people to starve physically or spiritually. Gospel Hospitality is both words and deeds.

And that is the hospitality that gives meaning to our mission of WELCOME as both a space of contemplation and a willingness to serve. Our mission of WELCOME is about both creating a space where people can engage the word of God, a word of love, a word of hope, word of grace, a word of acceptance and doing by reflecting this word of God, this word of love, this word of grace, this word of acceptance in every moment, in every minute, in every action, in every deed of our lives, of our journey as people of faith.

One of the commentators gave an alternate ending to this text that I think reclaims Luke's original intent. He said that when Martha came to Jesus to complain about Mary's lack of work, Jesus invited Martha to come and have a sit. He invited Martha to come to the table and be nourished, to come eat the main course of grace, love, and acceptance, and then following the meal at God's table, Jesus invited all, including Mary to come along to do the dishes, to feed the hungry, to make care-packages for the homeless shelter, now that they were satisfied and fulfilled.

Love your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul. Love your neighbor as yourself. Hear these words. Embrace these words. Be nourished by these words.

Now Go and do likewise. Amen.