

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost July 21, 2019

Luke 10:38-42

Another familiar text, this week. Like last week this text is often preached along predictable lines. Mary chose sitting at the feet of Jesus, the better part than all the busyness of Martha. In a life that can feel all too busy, with so much going on and endless running too and fro, so many school practices and games, so many responsibilities at the office, so many organizations demanding our time and energy, we grab hold of this permission from Jesus to drop some of that and just relax. To be. But is that really what is going on here?

Context is key and we should remember that this text comes immediately after our reading from last week, the Parable of the Merciful Samaritan. There, Jesus seems to be gigging the lawyer to get out there and do. The emphasis, as in most of the Gospel of Luke, is on doing, on serving others as a sign of discipleship. When you see a fellow human being in need, you help them.

Now we get a story where Jesus lifts up listening as the best thing. First Jesus talks about the importance of doing. Now of listening. Which is it? Perhaps these two stories are meant to be heard together. Perhaps it is not either/or but both/and...and in that tension, note where Jesus puts the emphasis. On listening to him.

The word used to describe Martha welcoming Jesus is a technical word used for hospitality. Martha is doing all those things society expected of someone who was providing hospitality, who had taken responsibility for care of another in her household. It was a heavy responsibility. In taking it on she is fulfilling God's law for her in regard to a guest. She is doing a good thing. And it's not even this work of hospitality that Jesus points out to Martha as being the problem. Rather, it is the fact that she is "worried and distracted by many things."

To take the language seriously, Martha is literally being worried into parts creating a tumult of the mind that distracts her. From what? The one necessary thing. What Mary does, sit at the feet of Jesus and listen.

Luke recounts this story where he does to remind us that we are called to serve, but not get so caught up in our service that we lose sight of the One whom we serve. For there is one thing which is necessary, listening to Jesus' teaching. Otherwise, we might wind up like the ship on the high seas, whose crew got so busy swabbing the deck, washing the nets, and trimming the sails that they forgot to check their bearings. Before long, the ship inched off course. The reefs approached. The crew might get lost. The ship could wreck. And if it does they will say, "We don't understand. We were working so hard!" To be on the ship working is no good if we do not keep our eyes on the Lode Star that is Jesus. Listen to him, telling us where to go.

Corporately, if we do not take listening at the feet of Jesus seriously, through a focus on worship, hearing God's Word through study of Scripture, corporate prayer and discernment, then we could run aground and lose everything. All while being infinitely busy. "We don't understand, we were working so hard?"

What is the danger for us as individuals of not prioritizing listening to Jesus?

We have become a society, especially the Millennial generation, that highly values serving others. We become engaged in activities and causes that focus on care for the earth, feeding the poor, issues of social justice.

Okay, so what's wrong with an emphasis on service? Wasn't Jesus just pushing us to act last week? Here's at least one danger. Notice Martha's language to Jesus. What her focus is.

"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work myself? Tell her then to help me."

Did you catch that? The concern does not lie in those she is serving, it lies in her. I'm doing all the work myself. Tell her to help me! Yes, looking from the outside Martha's service is a good work. It's feeding Jesus and his disciples, providing them with shelter and a place to rest. But Martha's focus, ultimately is on herself. On what she is doing so

that they might have these things. She's turned in on herself. One of the definitions of sin. In curator est- Navel gazing.

I know the danger of this kind of service. Our family went to DC for vacation a few weeks ago. By inclination and unspoken agreement, I was the one who took responsibility for navigating us around DC. For figuring out when we had to leave to catch the Metro, how long it would take to get from one place to another. What bus to take where. There were many deadlines, places we needed to be at a certain time or some tour we had scheduled would not happen. Or we wouldn't be able to get to the next thing. I confess that it was hard for me to enjoy the time with my family because of that. I got so focused on making sure we got to where they wanted to be on time that I in many ways withdrew. And I knew it was going on and it was still hard not to allow it. I became focused on me. Even while telling myself it was all for them.

I was doing a good thing for my family. We got to where we needed to be with minimal fuss, on time, we even avoided an afternoon downpour thanks to my obsessing. They have all thanked me profusely, recognizing how difficult it was. But ultimately my own sinfulness made it about me...to the detriment of myself and my relationship with my family.

Brothers and sisters, there is much in our lives that is good. Service to others that makes us feel good, sports that give us confidence in ourselves and our bodies, volunteering and special causes that fulfill us.

But when these good things come at the cost of the necessary thing.

Listening to the lode star of our lives that is Jesus. Then all these good things become dangerous to us and our souls. I believe this is Jesus' concern with Martha. That in being so pulled apart and stirred up by all the "good" busyness of her life that she is doing damage to herself.

Look at the damage it is already doing to her relationship with her sister.

Like a tree needs to be fed and watered to become strong and healthy...to produce good and plentiful fruit, so we need to be fed at the feet of Jesus on a regular basis. If nothing else, to hear his grace and forgiveness for all of our selfishness, for those places we don't do enough. To be renewed by his love for us. To be reminded of the things in our lives that are necessary and those that are just shimmering fools gold. That look good on the outside but are worthless.

Brothers and sisters, I am not here to add another thing you have to do to your list. But I would be remiss if I did not point out to you that the only necessary thing is to sit at the feet of Jesus.

Yes, it helps us avoid the rocks that can destroy our lives. It can help us maintain focus on the importance of the relationships we have. Give us

courage to say “no” to even those good and (at least to the culture) important things.

But more so, I remind you of this, because only in Jesus can you find grace, an unconditional acceptance even with all your flaws. One that is not dependent upon what you can give to him, but because Jesus loves you just as you are. As crazy as that can sound.

I remind you of this because only in Jesus can you learn the way to that selfless love of others. A reflection of that love of Jesus that can transform lives.

I remind you of this, because only in Jesus can you be freed from your bondage to doing. Your bondage to live up to the standards you think are of utmost importance, and see the freedom you have from those things to focus on that which is most important: Love of God with all that you are...and love of your fellow human beings, especially those in need.

So, my siblings in Christ, in the midst of a world that can worry us into parts with all that we must do, with minds that are distracted by the tumult of those choices, may we together remember what is necessary...and say to ourselves. Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus, Give me Jesus.