

Pentecost 8C

Proper 11

Texts: Amos 8:1-12

Psalm 52

Colossians 1:15-28

Luke 10: 38-42

“Martha was distracted by her many tasks.” Luke 8: 40

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

**One of my son Stephen’s favorite things to say to me is, “Chillax Mom! Chillax!” Chillax is a combination of chill and relax. Stephen will tell you that he finds me uptight, easily frustrated and distracted by many things. And he is right. I’ll give David and the boys some tasks to help me with if we are having company and before they are done with chore A I will give them chores B, C, D and E. It makes them crazy, and rightfully so.**

**I love entertaining but getting to the point where I feel the house is in order and the meal cooked to perfection gets me a tad stressed out. I’m not really sure why that is. I know why I want to have people over- it is to create warm memories for them, to break bread and have fellowship with them. I’m afraid that the memories of my guests are always a lot more pleasant than the memories I am making for my family when I get like this.**

**So it is with real empathy that I relate to Martha in this gospel story. Martha is my type of gal...a go-getter, a person who gets things done, a person in charge, someone who extends the hand and heart of hospitality making memories for all she welcomes into her home.**

**Today we are told that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem; he was on his way to die. Jesus stops in to see Martha and Mary, two of his closest friends, friends who have nurtured and supported him in his ministry, friends with whom he could really let down his hair and just be himself. He stops by, possibly for some respite before he goes on to what he knows awaits him. Jesus, more than ever, needs the love and friendship these two women have always offered him.**

When he gets to Martha's home, Martha, in the traditional and expected way, greets him and begins the preparations for a meal. Hospitality was a very big deal back in Jesus' day. It was a virtue greatly prized and an expectation of the community. To not greet the guest in love, to not offer water for their feet and food for their bodies was a huge social faux pas. Martha knows what is expected of her and she dutifully goes about it.

Mary, on the other hand, perhaps sensing that Jesus needs to talk, perhaps knowing that this visit is different, does the unexpected and socially scandalous-she sits down at Jesus' feet just as a male disciple would and she listens to him. Mary gives Jesus her undivided attention.

Martha is busy bustling about and is a bit miffed that her sister, rather than helping out in the ways that were expected, leaves her to shoulder the burden of all the preparation. Rather than quietly going up to her sister and asking to have a word with her in the kitchen, Martha, God bless her, goes to her guest and tries to bring him into her camp and have him embarrass her sister into joining her and doing the work necessary to properly welcome him and the other disciples.

Asking the Son of God for assistance in getting help to get the chores done seems like overkill to me, but then again Martha was pretty exasperated. Martha let her anxiety distract her from truly attending to her guest and in fact, caused her to do something as socially inappropriate as her sister had done by sitting at Jesus' feet-she brought her guest into the conflict and laid the responsibility of arbitrating the situation at Jesus' feet.

“Martha, Martha, 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 from her.” In other words, “Chillax Martha. Let your anxiety go, let's sit down and talk together. Right now all I want is your attention. The other things will wait. Right now I need you to be with me.”

This story has often been seen as a story of service versus contemplation, of the proper role for women in the household of faith (serving) versus being a disciple. I don't think those are correct readings of this text.

**Mary's decision to sit at Jesus' feet and listen, the same posture as a male disciple, was incredibly radical; it could have had her stoned. But Jesus tells us that to sit at his feet and listen, to be a disciple, is open to all people and the opportunity to do so will not be taken away.**

**To understand this story in its entirety we have to look at the preceding story in Luke, the gospel from last week, which was the story of the Good Samaritan. It is in taking these two stories together that we have a better understanding of both.**

**The hated Samaritan, the outsider was the one who showed mercy, the one who went out of his way to serve someone very different from himself and who was in need. The most religious of the day, the scribes, Pharisees and priests couldn't be bothered. They didn't want to become ritually unclean so they passed by.**

**The story of the Good Samaritan is told to the young lawyer who asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks him to tell him what is in the law. The lawyer responds, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."**

**When Jesus tells the lawyer that if he does this he will live, the lawyer, wanting to justify himself (and that line is probably the most important line in the story) then asks, "who is my neighbor." After Jesus tells the story he asks the lawyer who acted like a neighbor towards the beaten man and the lawyer replies that the neighbor was the one who showed mercy. Jesus then tells him to go and do likewise.**

**Sometimes showing mercy is going and doing and sometimes it is just sitting and listening. It is not an either/or proposition, it is a both/and. To be a disciple is to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to him. To be a disciple is also to see the need of another and respond to it-not to justify oneself, but to honor God. And it is important to note that in both the story of the Good Samaritan and today's story, cultural and social boundaries were crossed so that God's work could be done.**

**Martha's problem was that she forgot the "why" of hospitality. She got so busy in the preparations that she forgot the reason for the hospitality to begin with which was to honor Jesus.**

**We disciples today often forget the reason for what we are asked to do. It isn't to do more to keep the doors of the church open. It isn't to welcome people so that our bottom line improves. We are disciples for one reason; we are disciples because we follow Jesus and do the work of his father here on earth.**

**We disciples often don't need to do more, we need to be more discriminating and discerning in what we do. We need to ground our actions in listening to Jesus and we need to be ready and willing to cross comfortable and expected boundaries in order to serve others.**

**Those who find themselves to be compulsive doers, like myself, need permission perhaps to stop, sit and listen. Those who find themselves to be compulsive listeners need permission to go and do. We cannot love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength if we do not sit at Jesus' feet and we cannot love our neighbor as ourselves if we do not go out and do likewise in showing mercy and compassion.**

**Dear St. Matthew's, let us all "chillax" a little and do something unusual and uncomfortable for ourselves. It's ok. God may well be calling us into a different type of ministry than we have ever considered, but we won't know that if we don't sit at Jesus' feet and listen.**

**Amen.**