

Today we will be reading from the end of the 10th chapter of Luke. Before we read this story it is important to understand what comes before it. Because it is clear that the gospel writer Luke is very intentional in the way that he organizes the 10th chapter.

The 10th chapter begins with Jesus appointing 70 people to go out by twos and share God's love in any home that shows hospitality. The 10th chapter begins with an affirmation of hospitality. If someone shows hospitality to these 70 disciples of Jesus then they will witness the kingdom of God.

It's not that they will earn blessings from God by showing hospitality. It's that when they show hospitality to the stranger then they will discover the blessings of God which are already there to be encountered. Hospitality does not earn blessings. But through showing hospitality to the stranger one welcomes the blessings that are already there. These 70 go out and then return to Jesus excited by all of the hospitality which they receive.

Then we have the story which we read last week. The story of the lawyer who asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him to love God and love his neighbor. The lawyer then asks a very dangerous question when he asks Jesus who is his neighbor.

Jesus then tells him a story where the hero in the story is a despised Samaritan who shows hospitality. The pastor and the church leader do not show hospitality. The person from a group that Jews would discriminate against turns out to be the hero in the story. Once again, hospitality to the stranger is central to the story that Jesus tells.

So we would maybe expect the 10th chapter to close out with another story about hospitality to the stranger. Instead we have a story of Jesus getting in the middle of an argument between two sisters. And getting in the middle of an argument between siblings is usually not a good idea.

Luke is the only one to share this particular story about Mary and Martha. The gospel writer John shares another story which is similar but only Luke records this particular story of Mary and Martha.

Read Luke 10:38-42

Notice who is the owner of this house. It is Martha. Jesus is welcomed into Martha's home by Martha. So Martha, being the good southern woman that she is, does all that she can to make her home warm and welcoming. But I realize this is not just a southern thing. Visit a home anywhere across the country or visit people in another country and the host, usually the woman, will do all that she can to provide a welcoming and clean home.

Like it or not it's what women are taught to do across a range of cultures. And so Martha sets out to do that. She sets out to provide a warm and welcoming home to her guest. She tries to show good hospitality like she was taught by her family and by her culture to do.

But in the middle of Martha working her tail off to show good hospitality we have her sister Mary. Mary does none of that. While Martha works hard to prepare her home for an out of town guest, Mary sits. Martha does lots and lots of tasks but Mary sits. Martha is busy cleaning and cooking and Mary sits. Finally Martha has had enough.

But rather than going straight to Mary with her complaint, Martha tries to triangle Jesus into their conflict. Martha is angry at Mary but rather than talking to Mary she talks to Jesus. Inviting someone else into a family conflict is never a healthy way to respond to conflict. And that is what Martha does.

"Lord," she laments. "Do you not care that my sister has left me to do all of the work myself. Tell her to help me." Poor pitiful Martha. Can't you just hear the drama in her voice?

But Jesus gives a response which may seem quite puzzling. “Martha, Martha, Martha.” Older folks like me may hear a Brady Bunch episode here. But Jesus continues, “Martha, you are worried and distracted. Mary has chosen the better option which will not be taken away from her.”

This story has usually been interpreted historically in a couple of ways. Some have used this story as a proof text to tell women that they need to be quiet and passive. Don't be the engaged and outspoken homeowner like Martha but be the passive listener like Mary. But that is not an accurate way to read this story.

Others have read this story as an affirmation that we should not get too busy doing tasks around the church and community and in the family. We should instead be focused on time in prayer and contemplation. And that is certainly an appropriate way to read this text. That has been the way I have tended to read it.

But do we really think Jesus is saying to the person who shows up early to practice music for worship to just take some time off? Do we really think Jesus is saying to the Mom or Dad who spends all of that time getting little ones ready to attend worship that they can just take some time off? Do we really think Jesus is saying to the person who spends their free time volunteering to assist at risk kids or a forgotten elderly person is to take some time off? I don't think so.

But did you pay attention to what Martha is criticized for? It is not her busyness that she is criticized for. Jesus criticizes Martha for being worried and distracted. Jesus criticizes her for focusing on herself rather than on Jesus. And these two observations go hand in hand. Focusing on oneself leads to worry and distraction.

We live in a culture now that because of technology can be described as a place of worry and continuous partial attention. If you turn on the television to watch news programs for more than 15 minutes a day then you are bombarded with people trying to make you worry. The more you worry the more you will watch their programming to tell you why you should worry more. 24 hour news channels want you to worry. Facebook is filled with worried people.

The place where we are as a culture is what one person has called “continuous partial attention.” Have you ever been in a restaurant and watched parents and their children sit at a table together and they are all on their smartphones or tablets and only paying partial attention to one another?

Maybe you are that family. We no longer are invited to be in the moment but to rather be partially attentive. To have some of our focus elsewhere. And being partially attentive means we have partial relationships.

But Jesus offers us something different. Jesus invites us to not be worried and distracted but to instead be present with Jesus. To not be so worried and distracted that we miss what God is already doing all around us. If we are worried and distracted then we will miss what God is actively doing and inviting us to be a part of with God.

I hope this service today is an example of what it means to be in the moment with Jesus. This is a unique service of worship. There will never be another one like it. So as we are in worship we are invited to place our worries somewhere else. We are invited to not be partially distracted. We are invited to be in this moment with Jesus.

As we leave this place we are invited to turn away from those items and temptations that lead to great worry and greater distractions. We are invited to be open and pay attention to what God is already doing in our midst. When we do that then we may find ourselves experiencing unique encounters with people we never would have imagined ever being with before.

We don't have to be worried and we don't have to be partially distracted.

We are invited to be present with God in Christ.

To be fully present with God in Christ. AMEN.

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-Taylor, Barbara Brown and David Bartlett, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 3, portion written by Wallace, James A., p. 267

-Some of the sermon outline based on sermon from Long, Tom, "Mary and Martha, Day 1, http://day1.org/1052-mary_and_martha

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