

"Both/And World of Worship and Work "
Pentecost 9, Luke 10:38-42
July 17, 2016, CUCC, Buena Vista, Colorado
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I. MARY AND MARTHA'S WORLD

Ah, Martha, Martha, Martha! Bustling, busy, and with a legitimate "bone to pick" in that kitchen. And Mary, Mary, seemingly contrary. Or, is it, Mary, Mary "full of grace?"

How many times have we looked to you both for guidance in this life? How many times tried to figure out which one we most resemble. Or don't. Or should. Or maybe should not.....?

What did Jesus *mean* when he said, "She has chosen the better thing?" Was it *really* all about priorities, focus, one pastime being preferable over the other?

I imagine that Martha *not* choosing that "kitchen thing" in favor of "the better thing", would have wreaked quite a bit of havoc on the household that night! Especially with such an important guest!

"What on earth has happened to our dinner?! What about setting the table? Did no one remember to chill the wine? Frost the cake? Wash enough silverware?"

After all, Martha was known for her hospitality. It's what she *did*; who she *was*. We depend on the Martha's of this world, don't we?! And, if they suddenly decide to go in the other room and sit down, we're up a Dinner Party Creek!

And then, there's Mary. Mary sitting on her duff and not lifting a finger. And we find it easy to look down our noses at the Lazy One. But then, Jesus comes to her defense, and we're *yanked* back. Oh wait! Maybe she's not lazy after all! She just has different priorities. Maybe it's the busy, *fussy* one we should be looking down our noses at. But wait! I'm more like that one. So, I might be in trouble.

"I know I probably should sit and listen and learn more and not be so pre-occupied with the numerous tasks at hand, but really! Is that even practical?! People are hungry and they need to eat, and I need to make that happen. Things need fixing and tending and preparing and organizing. If I don't do it, who will?!"

And, our head starts to spin as we go back and forth. Back and forth. What is the "better thing?" And we wonder: Did they ever *really* figure it out? Get it right? What happened *after* that little testy interchange? Did Martha stop scolding? Did Mary hop to it and at least do the dishes after dinner?

II. WE'VE GOTTEN IT WRONG

You know what *I* think? I think, that for 2000+ years, we've gotten this wrong! Gotten it wrong as we've gotten whiplash, going back and forth, back and forth, trying to figure it out. Trying to figure out what "way" we should be; whom we should try to emulate.

If we're *too* much of a Martha, should we strive to be more like Mary? If we're inclined to sit and soak *in* life, should we feel *guilty* for not pitching-in instead?

I think we've gotten it wrong, because, like with so *many* approaches we take to life situations, we've made it Either/Or. Either Martha's way or Mary's way. And frankly, it's *high* time we fully embraced this idea of a Both/And world, and start seeing even *this* scenario through those Both/And colored glasses.

Jane Anne Ferguson puts it like this: "This story is a timeless tale about Being and Doing—which is better? And, of course, we know that it is not about better or worse but about balance. We cannot embrace others, particularly those who may be enemies, unless we allow ourselves to be embraced by the love of God.

III. GOOD SAMARITAN

Last week we spoke of the archetype of the Good Samaritan. Folks have shared some great stories! Elvin Frantz was even ON the Jericho Road in the Holy Land, bringing supplies to those in need! Way to *live* the story out in real life!

(My Inbox is still OPEN for your homework if you didn't get a chance to tell your story yet of being on the giving OR receiving end of a Good Samaritan Scene.

Keep looking for that scene. Keep looking for ways to *make* those stories. For really, as we live on this planet together, the chances we have to come together, reach-out and go beyond ourselves and our own lives, in order to make a difference in someone's *else's* life—isn't that all that we really have? Isn't that what forms the foundation, the whole cloth of our lives and gives it meaning?

Is there really anything *else*? Connecting in space, sharing time and experiences with our fellow human beings? Loving God, and loving neighbor?

In fact these two stories, the Good Samaritan and the Mary & Martha story are connected by that very thread. Remember, right before Luke delves-into these, the religious leader challenges Jesus about what really matters in life and in faith. "What must I do to inherit abundant, eternal life?"

And, he (and we) are given a couple good examples of *how* to love the Lord your God and love your neighbor.

But. But, Martha is *not* a Good Samaritan. And neither is Mary, for that matter. For they are in their "camps." And when we compare them, and the paths they've chosen, (as we've been doing all these many years as we've interpreted this story), we *too*, form into camps. (And I don't mean "camp" in a good way, like "*going* to camp La Foret!")

IV. MARY & MARTHA GET TOGETHER

There's something missing. Some dots (and hearts) not connecting as Mary and Martha each hang in their own sphere, in their own room, claiming their space and role.

Mary and Martha need to *get together!* (Dare I say, they need to "stretch out to connect?") They need to pool their gifts. Not each cover their own little corner of the world. Our "Martha selves" (and this *isn't* just for women, mind you! Men, pay attention.) need to keep on tending and cooking and meeting the needs of the day and the hour, offering hospitality to *whomever* shows up!

But, Martha needs to reach *out* of that kitchen, into the living room, and grab ahold of some of *that*. That Spirit. That "better thing". That soul food to be found at the feet of Jesus, when we seek first to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength.

And, with "some of that" then Martha can do her tasks and service with a joyful heart instead of a testy, cranky attitude. No longer begrudging the important work and chores but offering the most lavish, cheerful hospitality anyone can muster.

And Mary? Mary needs to bring her gifts of gracious listening, mindfulness, being present in the moment, with a non-anxious presence to the table. She needs to reach beyond that footrest she's embracing—*into* the kitchen; into the mission projects, into the streets where the people are hurting and hungering for that warmth and compassion *she's* finding as she basks at Jesus' feet and soaks up a lesson in loving God with heart, soul and mind.

Mary and Martha need to get together. To join forces with energy, love and passion for others—in order to be Good Samaritans. If they are to find that eternal life: living abundantly in love of God and neighbor

V. BEING MARY & MARTHA

I decided to give this a shot this week—this blending of Mary and Martha energy. After all, if I'm going to encourage you all to do something, I should do research and development first, right?!

I spent a few hours working in the sun by a beautiful creek one afternoon. Filling my soul, and re-charging my solar cell while also accomplishing several tasks. That worked pretty well. But then...umm....it didn't go quite as well when I was listening to a lovely podcast between spiritual guru Thich Nhat Hanh and Krista Tippett, while driving over Trout Creek Pass. All the talk of mindfulness, of offering compassion and forgiveness, having a softening of the heart,.....mixed with the task of driving when I had someplace to get to....well, ummm....

The huge, unbalanced, over-loaded semi truck going 30 mph below the speed limit, passing *countless* pull-out lanes where he *could* have pulled over, causing other drivers to do ludicrous, life-threatening things....(like passing on double-yellow blind curves—my big pet peeve!). *That* guy really interrupted my Mary/Martha blending experience!

Or did it?

VI. PRAYER TREE BENT

At Camp La Foret, there are a number of unusually bent trees. In 2006, the staff at La Foret learned from a visitor that many of the unusually bent trees on the property are, in fact, Prayer Trees that were deliberately bent for directional and spiritual purposes by the members of the Ute Indian Tribe. The trees were bent perhaps as long as 200-300 years ago.

<The Prayer Trees are unique in shape; they come out of the ground take a 90-degree turn and then reach for the sky. The sapling was tethered with Yucca rope parallel to the ground and everyone circled the tree and prayed. They believed the tree

would hold their prayers for 800 years and each breeze would give their prayer new breath. They are located close to the meditation trail, and in close proximity to one another. The trees are a true sign of faith and hope. In ceremony, they were used in conjunction with tobacco pouches. A pouch was buried under the tree and others hung from the branches to blow in the breeze, releasing the prayers.>

These trees are a wonderful model for fashioning our lives. They serve their tree “purpose”—do their jobs of being trees every day—standing tall—even after all these decades. But, they are also full of prayers and they know how to stand quietly—bent a little horizontal in the forest, soaking up the sun, the water, the stillness—the presence of the Creator, and receiving the hugs and ongoing prayers of generations of pilgrims.

Which way are *you bent*? Toward Martha-style or toward Mary? If we have always bent one way, then our growth challenge at this moment, on this day, is to bend the other way a bit. Learn to bend toward sitting at the feet of Jesus and prayerfully embracing life OR bend toward the needs of the world that we can help tend and nurture—from the kitchen and beyond.

Where are we listening for the still-speaking God? Calling us to answer the cries of the “things that need to be done?” To get in with both feet and tackle the challenges before us at such a time as this—by bringing more love and compassion and mercy and response to our neighbor than we ever have before?

Or: To “be still and know that God is God and we are not” and let God wash over us in love and care and find God's peace within us—knowing we must be at peace within ourselves before we can bring peace in the world.

Or.....a little of BOTH? Every day. Every moment.

The Utes also have a lovely prayer –a reminder to learn from the earth. From the trees. From the stillness.

Earth, Teach Me (A Ute Prayer)

Earth teach me quiet ~ as the grasses are still with new light.

Earth teach me suffering ~ as old stones suffer with memory.

Earth teach me humility ~ as blossoms are humble with beginning.

Earth teach me caring ~ as mothers nurture their young.

Earth teach me courage ~ as the tree that stands alone.

Earth teach me limitation ~ as the ant that crawls on the ground.

Earth teach me freedom ~ as the eagle that soars in the sky.

Earth teach me acceptance ~ as the leaves that die each fall.

Earth teach me renewal ~ as the seed that rises in the spring.

Earth teach me to forget myself ~ as melted snow forgets its life.

Earth teach me to remember kindness ~ as dry fields weep with rain.

Charles Wesley:

Faithful to my Lord's commands

I still would choose the better part;

Serve with careful Martha's hands

And loving Mary's heart.

'The better part is BOTH parts!

So, go practice! Go into this week, looking for ways to Mary and Martha. All at the same time! To bend toward the sun, toward the light, going both horizontal and vertical all at once!

Reaching up and down to connect with God, and reaching side-to-side in love of neighbor. All at the same time! Both/and.

Worship and work becoming one. Amen.