

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 11—Year C
Amos 8:1-12
Psalm 52
Colossians 1:15-28
Luke 10:38-42

Ah, the story of **Martha** and **Mary**.

As Jesus and his disciples went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.

So, when you welcome a guest into your home, what do you do next? You offer them hospitality; you offer them something to drink; you set about preparing food. Martha is on it!

[Martha] had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying.

Ah Mary...she's a sponge for Jesus' words. The sound of his voice, his calm, who wouldn't want to sit at his feet?

But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? In the Greek, I am "alone, forsaken, destitute of help." Tell her then to help me."

Oh, Enneagram, Martha has gone to her 4 space.

Who in here thinks Martha is an oldest child? Who identifies with Martha's unfair, unjust, so-not-right-plight, and her keen sense of responsibility?

And who thinks Mary might be the youngest child? Who identifies with Mary's enjoyment of the moment and her obliviousness to the work going around her?

Martha's, what adjectives would you use to describe the Mary's in your life? *Lazy, irresponsible...*

And Mary's how might you describe the Martha's in your life? *Uptight, driven, all-work-no-play...*

For many of us, this story hits awfully close to home, yes?

So, like a child goes to a parent to mediate the conflict, Martha appeals to Jesus. And one might expect Jesus to listen patiently, discern wisely, and deliver an impartial verdict.

But no. Jesus squarely comes down on the side of Mary, vindicating younger siblings everywhere, and really throwing the Martha's of the world under the bus.

But the Lord answered her, “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 away from her.”

Ah, okay Jesus, but seriously, just how is supper going to get on the table???

Context here is so important.

In the previous passage, Jesus has just had that **encounter the lawyer who tested him about what one must do to inherit eternal life, which of course is to 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 [love] your neighbor as yourself.** And as the lawyer seeks to drill down into this question of “**And who is my neighbor?**” Jesus responds with the story of the **good Samaritan** which is all about the *doing of mercy* with the final command to “**Go and do likewise.**”

So, this isn’t about pitting *doing* vs. *being* and saying *being* is the best. *Doing* matters a lot.

But it is much more a question about distraction.

When **Jesus tells Martha that she is distracted**, that word means “*to draw away, to be driven about mentally, to be over-occupied.*” This is about the mind that is consumed and busy and driven, that has too much going on. Think about the speed of our world these days, and the level of news hitting us on so many fronts from so many directions on any given day. Anybody else’s mind feeling driven about and drawn away from what gives us life? Anybody else have too much going on in their head?

And while the NRSV speaks of Martha being distracted by her many tasks, the Greek uses the word **διακονία**, which means “*servicing*”—think diaconate, think deacons. This wasn’t mindless busy work that had captured Martha’s attention, but this is **good serving**; this is the **kind of service that forms the basis of Christian life for all of us, a life of serving others.**

Which goes to remind us, that even our deeply-rooted, well-intentioned, most sacred forms of serving can still draw us away from the Source of our life. We can still get lost in all the activity.

And Jesus can see that Martha’s **worry** has drifted into full-on **anxiety**, and the word the NRSV translates as distracted at this point actually means “*disturbed, troubled, disquieted.*” All is not well with Martha’s soul; her soul is *tumultuous*.

Jesus tells her, not as criticism, but with gentleness and deep care, “**Martha, there’s only one, one thing that’s necessary. Mary has chosen,**” and Jesus doesn’t say the **better** part, but in Greek, Jesus says, “**Mary has chosen the good part.**”

“Martha, there’s only one thing, one that’s necessary, and Mary’s chosen it, and that’s me, my presence, my words.”

This is absolutely essential, especially in these times in which we live right now. I read this little devotional book called *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young, and so many days, Jesus says some version of, “*I know the world wants you to get on with it, to get about your work, your tasks, all these things that feel so urgent, but start with me. There is nothing more important than spending time with me.*”

In our go-go-go, produce-produce-produce world, it is a radical act, a revolutionary act, to sit at Jesus’ feet and listen while the world is spinning around us.

As **Amos** knows so clearly, when the world falls apart, and the **needy are getting trampled** and the **poor are getting sold** down the river, it won’t be **a famine of bread, or a thirst for water that will descend upon the land, but it will be famine of hearing the words of the Lord**. Amos tells us: “**They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it.**”

Everybody’s running all over the place, **seeking the word, but they can’t find it** because you need to step out of the noise of the world and the noise in your head and sit still to hear, not the billions of words that have been weaponized, but to hear the word that really matters, the word of the **LORD**, which is always a word of love, a word of mercy, a word of compassion that walks as justice.

It’s not that *doing* is bad and *being* is good—clearly God needs co-creators, co-redeemers, co-sustainers, co-workers in this world and God needs the *do-ers* to know that in the depths of their *being* they are loved, are cherished, are enough just because they breathe God’s breath and bear God’s image in this world. We have to be grounded deep in this way of *being*, sitting at Jesus’ feet, letting his words shape our psyches and imaginations, letting his words inspire our ethics and our moral vision and our desire for justice that’s bigger than our own little frames; we have to sit here and let Jesus quiet our frenetic minds and soothe our aching hearts and still our tumultuous souls, so that our *servicing* really will be *διακονία* and not just a lot of busy work that isn’t serving to reconcile and mend this broken world and may in fact be contributing to that brokenness.

Let’s not pit the older sister Martha against the younger sister Mary, but let’s recognize that we all have a Martha and Mary that live within us. Today, it’s the Martha within us that needs the Mary corrective. Tomorrow, it may well be the Mary who needs Martha to show her how to engage the work of mercy while remaining firmly at Jesus’ feet.

The world is too broken to simply stay in the house, and the world is too divided and distracted to just keep doing what we’ve always done.

We need both of these sisters now more than ever, both in the work that God has given us to do, and in our souls, where these energies truly seek to live together as ONE. Amen.

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