

Sermon July 17, 2022

Luke 10:38-42

The story of Mary and Martha always makes me feel manipulated a little bit. It seems like the story is asking us to choose to be like one sister and not the other—when in fact, I believe that we all have a little bit of both Mary and Martha in us. But, of course, that’s not the point. Jesus really is trying to tell us something.

Sometimes we just need to stop—to sit down and to listen. Sometimes, whatever we are doing, even if we’re trying to do good, ---- God really needs us to stop. Stop doing so much, stop trying so hard. Stop trying to fix everything. Stop trying to justify ourselves by looking busy. Stop doing and start listening. Sit down at Jesus’ feet and try to hear where God’s Spirit is moving — in your life and in the world around you.

The world we live in is full of problems, --- problems we all want to fix. And--The problems we are facing today don’t have easy fixes: how best to protect the environment? How to distribute resources fairly? How to protect our freedoms? How to protect ourselves while welcoming people who are different from us? So many distractions! All these issues require careful, prayerful discernment — at least, they do if we are going to respond from a place of love and not fear.

Jesus’ call to us is to enter more into the way of love. But finding love amid that fear that surrounds us takes some work on our part. We would be wise to seek out God’s presence---to set aside the noise and distractions of the world so that we can best hear God’s voice.

Where do you hear God’s voice? Each of us might answer that differently. If you’re having a hard time finding God, go to those places where you know God lives. Come to church, sing the hymns, take communion. Go outside to enjoy the beauty of the sky, or the gardens, or the trees, or the parks. Say thank you to God, even if you aren’t feeling thankful. Act with love, even if you aren’t feeling the love. And love will come to you. It’s the old “fake it till you make it” principle.

God is also alive in the struggle for justice. We know that God lives among the marginalized, that God fights for the poor and upholds the weak. And right now, it seems that more and more people are worried about losing freedoms.

So go and be among the poor and marginalized, not to fix them, but merely to listen. To abide with one another. To build community. To keep our hearts open.

Here's the deal, the presence of Jesus in our lives changes things. Some of the old rules—like “look out for number one” will not work anymore. It may be inconvenient sometimes, difficult at other times, but God calls us to reevaluate our systems and customs.

Martha thought that she could invite Jesus into her house, into her life, and then return to business as usual, with nothing else any different.

Jesus was telling Martha, --- and us, ---- that it doesn't work that way. Once Jesus is invited in, once he begins to become a part of things, then sooner or later all of life will be different, all of life will be changed. Jesus does not fit neatly into a world and a life that is already established in predictable patterns.

Jesus messes us up. Jesus asks us to reconsider and re-evaluate everything. There is no telling what that re-evaluation is going to look like. In today's gospel story, the way this Bethany household works is going to be different now; and there was no doubt going to be other changes as well.

Both Mary and Martha were different now. Jesus had been there. Things are not going to be the same. Life changes when Jesus is invited in. That's the point.

Jesus sought out all kinds of people to share his message with: tax-collectors, Pharisees, Roman soldiers. But he felt comfortable in Mary and Martha's house in Bethany: According to Wikipedia, some scholars think Bethany means “house of affliction or “house of the poor”.” Bethany, a place for the homeless, the lonely, the destitute.

This is where Jesus' closest friends lived, his chosen family. If you want to be his disciple, you will find him there still. Sit at his feet with Mary and learn how God's love can change the world.

Remember, when Jesus is invited in, things change.

Love God, love your neighbor, change the world.