

Luke 10:38-42**Jesus Visits Martha and Mary**

38 Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him.³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying. 40 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? Tell her, then, to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, 42 but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Sermon for July 17, 2022 Dorset Proper 11, Yr. C
 “The Struggle between Word and Deed”

Luke 10:38-42 Jesus visits Martha and her sister Mary

The Silent Meditation this morning reads,
 “Preach the Gospel at all times—if necessary, use words.”

It is well for us to be wary of words: Our world is full of words; they are all around us. I came across a cartoon showing a preacher with the word, “**words**” covering the whole page from top to bottom.

Words can be used for propaganda. There are political leaders who use words to persuade us that are sometimes downright lies. I think of the 1930s when the German academics, like most intellectuals, in the Third Reich in Germany found it convenient to be neutral, when not openly supportive, with respect to **Hitler’s race policies**. They believed the Nazi propaganda, and glossed over what was happening to Jews and to so many others.

Today, we face a situation in social media of having false or alternative facts, even conspiracy theories, that spread as truth. Advertisers surround us with words; testimonials to get us to consume more and more. And in place of normal conversation, some among us can become glued to their cell phones.

‘The silence that is needed for words to have meaning is noticeably lacking both in those who speak and in those who hear.’

We depend on words. Teachers with pupils and students, husbands and wives, parents and children, families. In church,

the words we say and sing and pray bring meaning and purpose for us together. In our national society, the communication of words underlies our understanding and discernment of truth and non-truth or falsehood.

God is a speaking God –and the human creature “made in God’s image” is a speaking animal. Luther thought that the name *Homo loquens* was a much better and biblical way of defining the human than the classical concept - *Homo sapiens*.

Unlike the God of Genesis, we cannot actually create by command or fiat. However, we are called to comprehend *God’s* Word in some degree, and also to find for ourselves the words that are needed today to communicate that living Word to the others, to those who are interested, as well to those who may care less, until they are confronted with life beyond their control. As the Bible says, How shall they hear without a preacher?

So, despite our wariness-perhaps sometimes our weariness-of many words, as Christians we are called both to listen to Jesus’ words and to work very hard at finding “the right words” to communicate God’s truth and purpose to ourselves and to others.

Today’s story in scripture lifts up both words and deeds.

Now as they went their way, Jesus (he) entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.

(Luke 10:38)

At the outset in our scripture passage, we see hospitality being shown; first by Martha in welcoming Jesus and his disciples into her home. She was being faithful to a long tradition of

hospitality expressed when Abraham welcomed three guests to his tent. * Just as Abraham turned to Sarah to assist with the duties of hospitality, Martha expected Mary to do the same. Her expectations did not include Mary's sitting at Jesus' feet to listen, as would a male disciple, leaving the work to her.

*(Gen. 18:1-10).

Mary was eager to be a disciple. She took the initiative to sit at Jesus' feet, spellbound by his words. There is no telling how long she had been listening when Martha reached her limit and asked Jesus if he cared about the injustice, she felt his presence had caused. Who of us does not sympathize with Martha?

Jesus may have already heard her from the kitchen. Who would blame Martha for banging a few pots? She had work to do and her frustration was building. So, she speaks to Jesus. "Lord" Do you not care? She asks him to tell Mary to help her.

Jesus cares. But he also cares for Martha's spirit. Jesus is gently, possibly with a smile, calling to Martha to change her focus

Jesus is not saying that listening to what he says is better than active service. In the 10th chapter of Luke, just before this, he has told the parable of the Good Samaritan who stopped on his journey, and took care of a man beaten and wounded by robbers, and left for dead on the side of the road.

The early church chose deacons to help the apostles do their work. Seven are set aside to distribute food to widows and those in need. Deacons, from the Greek word *diakonia*, in Luke-Acts refers to food preparations and table service, but can also point to service and ministry more broadly. We remember that Jesus refers to himself as "one who serves."

So, we can say that Martha's work is part of what the church has always done.

'Jesus is not going after Busy Martha, but Worried and Distracted Martha. He is speaking to his dear friend Martha, who has worked herself into a state of anxious distraction over the meal she wanted to have for Jesus and the disciples with him. She focused her frustration not only on her sister, but now also on her friend and guest, and in her distraction, she lost sight of the one she significantly calls "Lord."

Hospitality is about food; but not primarily only food. It is about the people we welcome.

Jesus said, *there is only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part.* How do we understand that? Theologian John Shea observes that, while in English we hear Mary has chosen *the better part*, in Greek the word is translated as *good*. Mary has chosen the good part meaning she has chosen 'the connection to God.'

Mary's listening to Jesus reminds us that **a community that is hospitable to Christ attends to God's word.**

In *The Message, The New Testament in Contemporary Language*, Eugene Peterson writes:

As they continued their travel, Jesus entered a village. A woman by the name of Martha welcomed him and made him feel quite at home. She had a sister, Mary, who sat before the Master, hanging on every word he said. But Martha was pulled away by all she had

to do in the kitchen. Later, she stepped in, interrupting them.

“Master, don’t you care that my sister has abandoned the kitchen to me? Tell her to lend me a hand.”

The Master said, “Martha, dear Martha, you’re fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing is essential, and Mary has chosen it—it’s the main course, and won’t be taken from her.”

It is a misreading of the story to call Martha the “practical” sister. She had allowed herself to get hustled or hurried. Not understanding Jesus, she thought he would appreciate fussy and elaborate preparation. What he really wanted was quiet and attentive listening, and this Mary gave him.

“Martha, Martha” –Jesus often repeated his friends’ names twice—
 “You are worrying and working yourself up over getting a big supper ready; one course will be enough. Mary has chosen the menu that suits her and me, and she is not to be dragged away from it.”

Mary choosing to sit at Jesus’ feet is choosing for herself the place of a disciple of a rabbi. Jesus throughout Luke’s gospel shows an openness to women. In contrast to the male-centered society of his time, Jesus welcomed women to be his followers and disciples.

Many women were involved in Jesus’ ministry. They were partners in providing from their means and resources for Jesus and the disciples in their work. Although a woman is not listed among the twelve, I believe they were among his most faithful followers.

On the one hand, as a church we can become “worried & distracted

by many things.” This can be true if we spend all our attention on ourselves and shoring up the institution.

The office at this church is a very busy bustling place, yet the focus is on people, and the various ministries and outreach shared there shines like light in the midst of the busyness. One could say it is a Martha place grounded in Mary devotion.

When any of us sit at Christ’s feet, studying, praying and nurturing a faith that seeks understanding, then **even the details of our common life begin to resound with good news.**

You may be at a dinner party when an off-the-cuff question opens up a discussion about the meaning of life. You may have the chance to listen with caring and support when a crisis of faith takes place in a hospital room. A church committee meeting that is dealing with mundane issues may be led to find their work grows in grappling with the mystery of life.

We all become distracted when we should be giving God our full attention. We may see and meet God in our neighbor in need. A suggestion to begin with: For five minutes each day, find a quiet place and focus on the presence and Peace of Christ.

We each to some degree have Martha and Mary inside us. This is not a Mary vs. Martha story, but a balance of both-and. We are called to recognize that God is both inside and outside, sustaining us while summoning us to work and, through our service, to bring about a world of justice, mercy, and peace.

When we are fully in the service of the *diakonia*, the deacons, of Christ we forget about ourselves.

And we are left with the question, **How are we to show hospitality when the kingdom of God comes near?**

The hospitality of both Mary and Martha is at work in a more modern story. The context of which just a few years back was that some people in our country were very suspicious of Muslims and of many, or all, strangers.

A true story from Facebook. *by Naomi Shihab Nye*, told in her own words.

‘Wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal, after learning my flight had been **delayed four hours**, I heard an announcement: **“If anyone in the vicinity of Gate A-4 understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately.”** Well—one pauses these days. **Gate A-4** was my own gate. I went there.

‘An older woman in full **traditional Palestinian embroidered dress**, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled on the floor, **wailing**. **“Help,”** said the flight agent. **“Talk to her.** What is her problem? We told her the flight was going to be late and she did this.”

‘I stooped (down) to put my arm around the woman and spoke haltingly, (in the Arabic I remembered). **“Shu-dow-a, shu-bid-uck, habibti? Stani schway, min fadick, shu-bit-se-wee?”**

The minute she heard **any words she knew**, however poorly used, she stopped crying. **She thought the flight had been cancelled entirely.** She needed to be in El Paso for **major medical treatment** the next day. I said, “No, we’re fine, you’ll get there, **just late. Who is picking you up? Let’s call him.**”

‘We called her son. I spoke to him in English. I told him **I would stay with his mother** till we got on the plane. She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while **in Arabic** and found out of course **they had ten shared friends**. Then I thought just for the heck of it why not call some Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her. This all took up **two hours**.

‘She was laughing a lot by then. Telling about her life, patting my knee, answering questions. She had **pulled a sack of homemade mamool cookies**—little powdered sugar, crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts—from her bag and was offering them to all the women at the gate. To my amazement, **not a single traveler declined one**. It was **like a sacrament**. The traveler from Argentina, the mom from California, the lovely woman from Laredo—we were all covered with the same powdered sugar. **And smiling. There is no better cookie**.

‘Then the airline broke out free apple juice and **two little girls from our flight** ran around serving it and they were covered with powdered sugar. And I noticed **my new best friend**—by now we were holding hands—had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing with green furry leaves. Such an old country traveling tradition. Always carry a plant. **Always stay rooted to somewhere**.

‘And I looked around that gate **of late and weary ones** and thought. **This is the world I want to live in. The shared world**. Not a single person in that gate—once the crying

of confusion stopped—seemed **apprehensive about any other person**. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women too.

Naomi Shihab Nye concluded, ‘**This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.**’

Quoted from Facebook Friday, Nov 20, 2015.

(Pause)

The powdered sugar covering everyone was like a blessing from God. We can say that **both word and action intermingled** in the listening, in the speaking and connecting.

The Martha and Mary hospitality of accepting one another, also with food, was on full display. We need both word and deed, devotion and action to live in that community

May we encourage each other, today and into the coming weeks to find fresh ways to share God’s hospitality with each other, and with our world, to counter the pervasiveness of fear and hate. May the words of Jesus live in us and help us to reach out as a community of trusting and caring and love.

Amen.

PRAYER OF PASTORAL CARE July 17, 2022 Dorset

The Prayer response: **God, save us, heal us, and make us whole.**

Creator God, as we look at the world you have made, we notice that the songs of love that you wanted us to sing have in many places turned into cries of abuse, oppression, and prejudice. We have abused the planet you have provided for us to inhabit and to share with other creatures. Too often we as a people have wasted the water, abused other resources, limited access to food, and marked borders of inhospitality. We pray for this world in need of restoration and ask that you provide us with the tools and the intelligence needed to rebuild the world you created for us and all creatures. **God, save us, heal us, and make us whole.**

We pray for the nations of the world. We pray that a ceasefire may come to Ukraine, and in other areas of violent conflict. May we work toward the day when all may live without fear of oppression or war. In this country we thank you for the thorough investigation of the January 6th insurrection. And pray that the protection of democracy and human rights may be strengthened. Our prayers are for the safety of all who travel, and for protection against gun violence for all people.

God, save us, heal us, and make us whole.

We acknowledge that there is oppression in the world that we live in. We see it in the ways we human beings treat one another, taking advantage of those considered to be of less value. Too often we turn our eyes away when we see the needy being trampled or the poor being stashed away out of sight. May your will be the last word, and may the church be an effective witness to the Lord in our midst. **God, save us, heal us, and make us whole.**

We see prejudice in some of our relationships, Lord. When we judge one another with fear and misinformation, instead of with justice and fairness. It is sometimes easier to demonize than to take the time to listen and to establish relationships. It is often easier to assume than to ask questions and to acquire knowledge. Make us agents of peace and restore our songs of love for you and for one another. **God, save us, heal us, and make us whole.**

O living God, we lift before you those on our church's immediate needs prayer list.

Grant us this day, O God, not to be overtaken by anxious thought that can make us feel that you are not near. Give us the chance to sit at your feet, to enjoy every word and every musical note that we may feel your real presence and in turn live out that presence within our families, our communities, our jobs, and our schools. Prepare us as we journey as your people to worship and obey your inner leading in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

OFFERING

In gratitude for all that God has done for us, let us present our gifts to God.

*DOXOLOGY

*PRAYER

O God, receive these gifts, which are the product of our labors, and let us not forget the better part of our offering, which is our devotion to the words of life we have received from Christ our Lord. Amen