

Scripture: Psalm 82 & Luke 10:38-42

What We See When We See

Some might say that the passage from Luke, often called “the story of Mary and Martha” though it is much more a channel surfing moment than even part of the story of either woman; gives a bird’s eye view of how God through Jesus the Christ calls us to live. I have heard people praised for being “Mary” and chastised for being “Martha”, as if the point of distinction in this passage was an iron clad description of either’s personality. This passage has been interpreted to say that faithful living is either/or. You are either Mary or Martha, you are either busy with the things of this world or you are contemplative, holy, spiritual. Yet I propose that neither Mary, Martha or life are or should be lived at one extreme or the other, that in this passage, throughout the whole of Scripture and other ways that God’s will and way have been revealed are much more about life as both/and than either/or.

That oft used phrase “bird’s eye view” can shed an interesting light on this passage: Recently scientists discovered something fascinating about the bird’s eye view of things. Birds have their eyes on the side of their head and as a result can only look at something with one eye at a time. It turns out they get a different perspective with each eye. The left eye contains a large number of cells which detect color, while the right eye has more movement detecting cells. So they see different things when they view with each eye. When a bird is seen “shaking it’s head” it is striving to get a sense of the “both/and” rather than either or.

As we travel our journey of faith and faithfulness we will encounter times when we see as Martha saw in the moments captured by Luke, and other times when we see through Mary’s eyes. We are also invited to see and discover that both worldly and sacred are a part of life as God has designed it and humanity has shaped it. I venture to say that Mary did not spend all of her life setting, either physically or literally, at the feet of Jesus, nor did Martha work without rest or without thought or attention to the things of God.

I claim this story as my own, as I hear it to be much more about awareness than about either woman’s specific actions. Martha was aware of what needed to be done regarding running the household and meeting the expectations of those gathering; her mind was filled with the here and now, in that moment. I suspect that this was not continually Martha’s view point, for if so, how would she have come to care for deeply and respect Jesus? As translated, Jesus names that she is, in that moment, distracted and worried; while Mary, in that moment is focused on seeing, experiencing and embracing the presence of God.

The possibility and challenge offered in this passage, as in many others, is the God given ability to be both “at the feet, listening” and about the tasks of life and living. I love and embrace the sacraments of the church, they are “scheduled” and “interrupt” my life by calendar or circumstance, and I welcome those interruptions. Left on my own, it would be easy to never find the “right time” to come to The Table or Font. Thanks be to God for the routine and practice of the church which creates and recreates these “at the

feet” moments. Yet, just as we are called to practice the Sacraments, we are called to sacramental living; to deliberately acknowledging and embracing God’s presence in each area and aspect of life. Perhaps the “better part” the “part which will not be taken away” which Jesus named in Mary was not the sitting at that particular moment; it was the awareness that God was presence and her willingness to focus her heart and attention on that presence alone. Perhaps this story is not about rather we are busy or still, it is about how aware we are that there is always something more, there is always God, in our midst. Could Mary have joined in the tasks at hand, while still listening to and for God revealed in Jesus. Could Martha have shifted her focus so that rather than worry and distraction she went about her duties with sense of joy and honor that she and her home could be a place where God made God’s presence known?

Can we go about life, walking heart and hand with God? How different would our view be if we, like a bird, developed the habit of shifting our sights so that we might see everything and every moment infused with God? Imagine what might become of our relationships if we set a place for or acknowledged the presence of The Christ always with us. In Martha and Mary moments, with friend, foe and stranger God is with us. Every thought is a prayer, rather we deliberately address God or not. Every breath is filled with The Spirit, rather we allow ourselves to be filled or quickly exhale.

Good church folks, through ages and ages, have spent a lot of time speaking and pondering works and worship, service and solitude, surrender and receiving of life, sharing faith or sharing resources, Marys or Marthas. Is it possible that these are not varying or even warring components of faithful living, but are aspects and attentiveness which all are invited and encouraged to embrace?

I suspect and am experimenting with understanding my spiritual and social view points or levels of awareness to be two aspects of one, integrated, holistic faith-filled response to God’s grace and love. While I’m looking for God in the whole of my life, I am seeing others through an ever widening sense of sight. I hope you will join this experiment with me, and we will experience and grow together. Let’s read the newspaper as a part of prayer life. Let’s treat each day as a part of a grand “mission trip” where we are sent to serve, share and immerse ourselves in the lives of others. Let’s do the work of Martha with the listening and godly focus of Mary.

Let’s include the Pharisees and the untouchables in our circles of acquaintances, interactions and acceptable to be with ones. Let’s not only chose but grab onto that better part with the boldness that only trust in God can bring. While keeping in mind that it is a part, a part of life, a part of faith, a part of who we are as the people of God. People who are continually aware we are walking hand and hand with God and with all others.

As a people who know we are bound to all of creation because we are bound to God. As a people who care deeply, share freely, pray continually, receive with grace, walk in humility ----- who represent and re-present Christ to all the world.