

Sermon for July 17, 2022

Come Sit Awhile

As a child I almost never missed school. In fact, we had to be very sick to stay home. I remember staying home once with pink eye and the other time I recall missing school was when I was out for a week, maybe longer, because I had come down with the flu. I don't remember much about that week. I recall cans of Campbell's chicken and stars soup. I remember staying in my bedroom so I wouldn't get others sick, in particular my brother. I remember a really horrible tasting medicine, and I remember my grandmother coming to see me with a stack of new books for me to read.

In that stack of books, was the story of a young girl who had the most amazing birthday party! While I do not recall the title of the book, I read that book over and over and over. This little girl was preparing for her birthday and they built booths and had a carnival for her party and at the end of the night fireworks were set off. It was amazing. I told my mom I wanted a birthday party like the one on the book, so my mom read it and laughed. I remember her telling me that those were not the kinds of parties people like us had. My mother, who was great at many things, would have never have spent the money on such an affair. We simply couldn't spend money on a party. I mean, I had birthday parties, and they were always fun, but my mother's idea of a party for me was always something simple. I remember once we had my party in the church basement following worship. She invited all the children to stay after church and we had chips, sandwiches, and cupcakes. Each cupcake lovingly made by my mother's own hands, and as I am grown I have a greater appreciation for this, but at the time, I always

wanted something more...I guess you could say, “grand.” As I read that book over and over, I vowed that if I ever had children I would throw them very creative and fun birthday parties. And I stuck to that vow. Now, I never spend lots of money. Our parties are usually at our home and I make most everything myself: from making superhero capes out of t-shirts I found at a thrift store for 10 cents each to having a tea party complete with fancy teacups bought from Goodwill. And now that my son is older, his parties mostly consists of having friends over to play video games and watch Monty Python movies. My daughter, whose birthday is at the beginning of the summer, is lucky if she has more than 3 friends over and so her parties have become less extravagant as the years have gone by as well. But we always try to find fun theme foods and get a little creative and the best part is that now they enjoy helping to plan these parties as well. Sometimes they have realistic ideas and other times...well...let’s just say some of those ideas are next to impossible to bring to life. And no matter how much planning goes into the event, and no matter if the party is large or small, there never seems to be enough time to get everything done, and in the last few hours I always find myself becoming anxious and stressed and saying, “Hey! Will someone please come help me?”

And this anxiety comes for a child’s birthday party. I cannot imagine if I were to, oh, I don’t know, let’s say, throw a party for the Messiah and his guests! What kind of anxiety would we have if we knew that Jesus was coming to visit? There are no housekeepers, or maids, or catered meals, you have to do it all yourself. And it’s not just Jesus, it’s his whole entourage. That could mean the 12...that could also mean the 70 something people who have been following him.

We like to give Martha a hard time, but I think we need to cut her a little slack. First, this was HER home. Not the home of her father or her husband, but she owned this home. It was hers. That is a huge triumph for a woman in that day and time. She had her own home. And as the owner of a home in Middle Eastern biblical times, your household had the responsibility of welcoming strangers into your home. Hospitality was a highly valued and widely practiced custom among all people back then: pagans, Jews, and Christians. The host was expected to provide food, shelter, amenities, and protection to those traveling and sometimes, as we saw in the text read from Genesis earlier, those travelers, those strangers, could end up being undercover angels, messengers from God. You never knew who you were hosting or how those guests would bless you.

Now, imagine that it is YOU, Your house, no spouse to help, no parent, just your sibling and you are trying to prepare for this whirlwind of guests, and the person of honor is the Son of God. Now, I don't know about you, but I also would be getting really upset that my sister, the one person who can help me, is simply sitting and listening to Jesus. Not to mention that back then, women were not supposed to sit at the feet of a teacher. That was not their place. Women were expected to do the heavy work while the men could sit. I imagine that not only did this bother Martha because of the work she is doing, but also because it crossed the cultural lines as she knew them. So, here is Martha, understandably filled with stress and anxiety that comes with being the perfect hostess, and you can see why she speaks up. "Jesus, tell her to help me!"

Now, we often read the words of Jesus, “Martha, Martha,” as if he is Jan Brady from the Brady Bunch talking about Marsha, “Martha, Martha, Martha...” Or maybe that’s just me...but, I think Jesus is more understanding and less sarcastic and not as condescending as I like to read into the text. I feel that Jesus is actually saying, “Martha...Martha...” Almost as if reminding her to take a deep breath. Reminding her that it will all be ok. Breathe. Not to stress, breathe....and he knows she is worried...breathe. She is distracted, breathe. Martha, breathe. Mary has chosen the better part. Breathe.

It’s here that a part of me wants Martha to turn to Jesus and say, “Of course she has chosen the better part! It’s the easy part!” But the other part of me really hopes that Martha stopped, took a deep breath, forgot about the things in the kitchen for a moment, and sat down at the feet of Jesus, let herself just be, and listened to what he had to say.

We miss out on so much by being distracted and worrying. We miss out on the simplicity and beauty of life. I see so many people with their heads in their phones these days, we are always connected to work and others, and I wonder if people ever look up and realize that children have grown, people have moved on, things have changed. I see people so distracted by their careers and their and desires for more and more and for bigger and better, that I often wonder how they find time for the people in their lives let alone God. And I see people, in churches, so focused on the doing that they busy themselves to the point where they forget to stop and remember that, just as important as it is to be about the doing, Jesus says the better part is sitting and listening.

When we stop to listen to God, to pray, or meditate on God's words, our bodies benefit. Prayer and meditation can lessen anxiety, depression, and stress. Prayer and meditation can help us to sleep better, can help us to be more focused, it can help us to let go of the things that are worrying us. When we stop to listen we begin to hear where it is that God is leading us. We begin to see the bigger picture and we become more focused and able to lead the life we desire.

Martha represents the life of servanthood and the work we are to do, while Mary represents the contemplative life, the life of the one who can sit and listen and pray and meditate on the words of God. The thing is, we are not called to do only one of those things. We are called to have both in our lives. We were created to have balance. Balance between the doing and being.

We live in a time and world where people around the globe, as a whole, seem to be more focused on the things of this world than they do on the things of God. But then, I guess that has been the case since the beginning of humanity, always focusing on having more and doing more and as a result, innocent lives are lost, the planet is being destroyed, and future generations will be left to clean up the messes we made. We are not being good stewards of our time on earth or with one another. We are distracted by greed and lust. We covet what others have, or always wanting more. Our desire to have more and be more and do more leads us to anxiety and stress and we find ourselves forgetting to stop and sit a while at the feet of Jesus. We find ourselves forgetting to be the people God calls us to be. We find ourselves deceitfully saying we are people of God, when the reality is that we are people of the world.

This goes beyond individualism, even churches and congregations often find themselves so distracted they forget the real reason they exist.

Rev. Cynthia Jarvis, a Presbyterian minister wrote, "A church that has been led to be "worried and distracted by many things" (v. 41) inevitably will be a community that dwells in the shallows of frantic potlucks, anxious stewardship campaigns, and events designed simply to perpetuate the institution. Decisions will be made in meetings without a hint of God's reign. Food and drink will appear at table without Christ being recognized in the breaking of bread. Social issues may be addressed, but the gospel is missed in acts that partake of politics as usual." - Feasting on the Word – Year C, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16)

We don't want to be the individuals or the church that misses out on the gospel because we are so easily distracted. We don't want to become more consumed with the ways of the world than the ways of God. We have to have balance and we have to find times to stop and discern: Is it a time of action, or a time to reflect on what God is saying? Do we get so bogged down with the worrying of how things get done and what we are going to do, that we begin to lose faith? Anxiety takes hold and we forget to stop and just be?

As I prepared for today, I thought of Martha. I thought about all the worldly distractions. The worrying of those here in Ladue and those in North County, where I live. I thought of those worries and how sometimes they are different and sometimes they are the same. I thought of my own distractions and anxieties and how I find myself

sometimes so bogged down with my “to do list” that I forget to stop and sit and listen. I thought about what it is like to be a woman who owns her own home and has to take care of it on her own and the pressures that comes from that. I thought about what it is like to know that people are about to walk through the door and you’re not ready...we’re not ready...I thought about how the stress of life can lead to health issues, both mentally and physically. And somewhere in the midst of all those thoughts, the song, “You Raise Me Up,” by Josh Groban began to play in the back of my mind....the lyrics, “When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary When troubles come and my heart burdened be, Then, I am still and wait here in the silence Until You come and sit awhile with me.”

Family of God, in our individual and corporate lives, we need to carve out times to sit and wait in the silence. Just sit, at the feet of Christ and just be, listening...and when you are filled, you will find that you are raised up and ready to do the work God has before us. We will see the beauty of God’s Realm when we find a way to balance the doing and the being. When we stop to sit awhile, we are not as likely to miss out on the goodness that happens around us.

As much as I like to throw birthday parties, one of my dearest and closest friends hates it. She had a party at her house for her son one year and she was so anxious with the crumbs on the floor after children ate cake and the children’s shoes left all over the place and the dirty dishes in the sink, she could not sit still. And when it came time for her son to open presents I went to her and said, “No one cares about this stuff. No one. Sit down and don’t miss him opening his gifts. Sit and be still and just enjoy some of

your child's birthday. It only happens once a year." She asked me how I knew she needed to be reminded of that and I explained to her that I have to remind myself of the exact same thing every time I throw parties for my children.

Don't let the distractions keep you from living. Don't let the worrying and the doing keep you from finding time to sit with Christ. You miss out on so much if you don't. Come, sit awhile.