

August 8 2010 Luke 10:38-42

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

One of my favorite musicals is THE KING AND I. I liked the music, the way Yule Brenner portrayed the King of Siam, walking around standing with his bald head and putting his hands on his hips to let you know he was king. From that musical, as I was thinking about Mary and Martha, who are the subject of this morning's sermon, that tune popped into my head where it is sung, "Getting to know you, getting to know all about you." And I thought to myself, "Hey isn't that what was happening in the story of Mary and Martha? While Martha was slaving away in the kitchen, according to her, preparing the meal for Jesus and perhaps his friends, Mary was "getting to know Jesus, getting to know all about him." I bet Jesus hopes there are lots of Mary's in this world "getting to know him, getting to know all about him." If they do, what a wonderful transforming world we would become. Let's turn to the words of Luke and ease drop on the conversations. **READ 10:38-42.**

Listen to a poem by Clive Sansom called MARTHA OF BETHANY.

*“It’s all very well, sitting in the shade of the courtyard talking about your souls. **Someone’s got to see to the cooking.** Standing at the oven all the morning with **you two taking your ease.** It’s all very well saying he’d be content with bread and honey. Perhaps he would-**but I wouldn’t**, coming to our house like this, not giving him or our best. Yes, it’s all very well him trying to excuse you, saying your recipe’s best, saying I worry too much, that I’m always anxious. **Someone’s got to worry-and double if the others don’t care.** For it’s all very well talking of faith and belief, but what would you do if everyone sat in the cool not getting their meals? And he can’t go wandering and preaching on an empty stomach-he’d die in the first fortnight. Then where would you be with all your discussions and questions and no one to answer them? It’s all very well.”*

WHOA! Would we think Martha has an attitude problem here? For me, reading that poem the key line is “It is all very well” concerning Mary’s choice to sit at the feet of Jesus, I began to hum to myself the chorus of another of my favorite songs, “It is well, it is well with my soul.” For Mary, it was well with her soul because she felt the peace that passes all

understanding that day. Her stomach wasn't requiring something to eat, but her soul was gurgling loud wanting spiritual food saying, "Jesus, feed me till I want no more. Tell me the stories. Tell me about the miracles. Tell me about our Father in heaven. Tell me how I can be a better person. Tell me how I can face my problems. Tell me how to get along with my sister, my brother, my neighbors, my boss. Tell me Jesus about you. Tell me how I can know the way."

In that little section, in that little time, we might ask, who was doing the right thing, Mary, who sat with Jesus? Or Martha, who was in the kitchen cooking? Mary never says a word in her defense. It was Jesus. For on this day, on this visit to their house, this was where Mary needed to be. We can't just brush Martha aside and say she was wrong by not going in there and listening to Jesus and just put on a pot of coffee and check out the cookie jar. I can tell you this, for Jesus that would have been okay. But not for Martha.

But you know, we need to take a closer look at the situation. We don't hear too many sermons on this passage of scripture. But this morning I felt that this is a good one because we have two wonderful sisters who

have two different ideas about “getting to know Jesus.” Martha, perhaps through feeding him a great meal with all the fixings. She was the cook in the family. She may have been the oldest and she wanted to treat the King of Kings as a King and provide him with a great meal. This was not to show off her skills, but to honor the most important guest she would ever have. I remember before I went into ministry Carole and I and two other couples visited a couple from India at their apartment. His father was D.T. Niles, maybe you don’t know him, but he was very popular in Sri Lanka in the United Methodist Church. His son was here getting his PHD at Boston University and we met at a camp meeting where he was the main speaker. She told us that one day she was having a professor over for supper and asked her neighbor what she could cook to honor her husband’s teacher. The woman told her a nice steak with all the fixings. She was surprised for in their country to honor someone of importance they would fix chicken. For the professor, I believe she cooked the steak. For us, their new friends, she cooked chicken. Martha wanted to fix Jesus the meal she would fix if she was preparing a meal for the King of Israel himself.

Mary, on the other hand, hungered for the stories and learning about walking by faith and how to get to heaven. So though she might have been a good cook, maybe pies were her thing, or bread, she chose to sit at his feet listening to him speak about faith, his dreams, his work, his ministry. Maybe it was the laughing that bothered Martha. Maybe Martha invited Jesus in, told Mary to make Jesus comfortable and set the table while she went to the kitchen to “whip” up a quick meal. I can picture her scurrying around the kitchen looking for what she had to cook and thinking how she could make this the finest meal Jesus and his friends had ever had. I picture her whistling and humming some Psalms as she heats the oven, starts to mix the flour for the bread and starts to cut the veggies. She thought that Mary should be in soon to give her a hand. Maybe she called for Mary to help and she may have replied she’d be there in just a few minutes. Jesus surely must be settled by now, and the table set. Yes, Martha could use a little help now.

While she was working in the hot kitchen going between hot ovens, mixing another batch of flower to bake a pie, to making sure things were going smoothly on her watch, she heard them laughing and she had had

enough! Maybe from the living room where Jesus, his disciples, and of course Mary were sitting, a noise from the kitchen could be heard. The clanging of pans. At first perhaps they thought Martha was just picking out the right cooking pan, or washing one in order to boil water for the sweet corn that she just went to the garden to pick, along with the potatoes, the tomatoes, cucumbers and the green beans. (Making you hungry, am I?) But the clanging kept on, and at times it seemed so loud, like someone was frustrated. No, more like there was anger in every clanging of a pot. It didn't seem like there was a happy cook in the kitchen. It felt more like one of those angry cooks you see on TV on one of those reality "I want to be a Chef" shows. But Mary ignored it the best she could, and it seems so did Jesus. Jesus was in the midst of recounting the story of his latest ministry, the one about the Good Samaritan and how he matched wits with the law expert about who was his neighbor. He perhaps told Mary the parable he told the lawyer about the man who was robbed on the road to Jericho by some thieves and left naked and for dead. Jesus looked at Mary and the disciples as he told how one of the priests was coming from the temple and noticed the ill

man, but instead of going to check on him, he walked to the other side.

A few minutes later another man walking down that same road, a Levite, who worked for the priests in the temple, also spots the body laying on the side of the road, and because he just finished his tour in the temple decides he will just ignore what was going on, so he too, crosses to the other side of the street and keeps on keeping on. About this time another man on horseback was journeying to Jericho on a business trip. He sees the naked man left to die, goes over checks for a pulse... yup, he has one, sees where he is bleeding and rips a piece of cloth from the nice Irish linen he was taking home so his wife could make a nice dress for them to go out and celebrate their 47 wedding anniversary in a few weeks. He stops the bleeding, takes out the bathing oil he was bring home to his wife as another gift to celebrate a very important birthday in September, so she could enjoy a nice cooling bath where she could get “lost in the moment” and rips another strip from the Irish linen and wraps it around as many bruises as he could so they would not get infected. This stranger didn’t know the man he was helping, and since he seemed to be in a daze he didn’t ask his name, but he put him on his

horse and took him to the nearest Holiday Inn. There he shared a room with him; made sure he got a good night's rest. In the morning while the stranger was still sleeping, the Samaritan left some of his clothing for him and went to the clerk to pay his bill and told him he would leave enough money to let the man stay another day and heal. And if need be, let this guy stay until he could travel on his own or someone could come and get him and if he owed anything, this stranger made a deal that when he was returning this way in a week or so, he would pay the rest of the bill. The disciples nodded as Jesus continued telling the story to Mary. She was all ears. "So, Master, that can't be the whole story. What happened? Come on Jesus, you got my interest, what's the end of the story like?" The disciples laugh, because they know the end of the story. Jesus smiles at Mary, looks at the disciples, puts his hand up to quiet them down and continues to say how he asked the lawyer who knew everything one question. "My good man, you know the Law of our people, which of the three was a good neighbor? Was it the first guy, the priest, who was afraid to defile himself by touching a naked man who might be dead? Why he could have at least covered his naked body,

don't you think? (The disciples shook their head at what Jesus said.)

Was it the Levite, who just finished his shift and headed home who also didn't want to be involved, and turned his back on the naked man? Don't you think he could have at least called 911? (Once again the disciples shook their heads.) Or was the good neighbor the Samaritan, who, not knowing if this fellow was dead or alive, who didn't care if he was a fellow Samaritan, or a hated orthodox Jew, cared for his wounds, gave him a place to heal, left money to feed and care for him." Jesus waited for the Lawyers answer as Mary waited for the answer, and the disciples laughing blurting out, "The one who took care of his needs!" And Mary looked astonished as Jesus said, "Then I told the Lawyer this....go and do likewise." He wasn't too happy, but he got his answer about who was the good neighbor.

About that time, more clanging, and the door to the kitchen comes wide open, almost busting it from its hinges as an angry Martha enters the room with a wooden spoon in her hand, tears in her eyes, flour all over her apron, her hands, her face, her little kerchief almost falling off her head. "I could use a little help in the kitchen. Jesus, enough is enough. I

hear all that laughing going on in here as I slave in the kitchen making lunch for you and your motley crew. While Mary sits doing nothing, I'm working my fingers to the bone, just for you. Master, tell her to get in the kitchen to help me. She can make the salad, shuck the corn, get the tea ready, and butter the biscuits. I'm plum tired. She needs to help if you are going to get a good meal."

"Martha, Martha, what is the matter with you? Mary just wanted to pick my brain, and since this might be my last trip here, well, she had a need to know more about me, my mission, and more about my Father in heaven. She picked a different meal to receive. She picked the manna from heaven. Don't fret with her. Me and the disciples don't need much too eat."

So ends the "Little Fish" account of the story of Mary and Martha. Such an interesting story to say the least. One might say Mary was lazy and Martha had all the right to complain. But was our poem writer correct when he said, "It's all very well, someone's got to worry...it's all very well talking of faith and belief but what would you do if everyone sat in the cool not getting their meals?"

Who was right?

Neither! I believe Martha was using her gifts and her faith to do what she wanted to honor Jesus. It wasn't that she thought she was more spiritual than Mary, nor did she think that she was better than her sister.

No! I see in Martha the willingness to make Jesus and his friends comfortable and to provide something wonderful for them. I know there have been times that Carole and I have visited unexpectedly and have been told they wish they had known we were coming so they could have prepared something for us to eat. I have told them, as I am telling you now; we visit to see the people, not to eat. We come to enjoy the friendship.

Maybe, just maybe, just as the woman who anointed Jesus for burial, maybe just maybe could we not say that Martha perhaps was fixing his last real banquet to eat on this earth? Could this, aside from the Passover meal, be his other last supper? She did not know that, but could it be possible that a prompting from the Holy Spirit was in order here? And I believe she started out with joy fixing that meal. She was doing it to the glory of God. She could have been singing "If you're happy and you

know it cook a meal. If you're happy and you know it peel potatoes. If you're happy and you know it, then smile and get right to it, if you're happy and you know it cook a meal."

But something happened. Listen to how the NIV translates the coming of Jesus to this home. It states, "(Jesus) *came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. **BUT**, (my emphasis) Martha was distracted (my emphasis) by all the preparations that had to be made.*"

Here is another person who was distracted. Maybe that mean old man in the red suit and carrying the pitchfork pricked Martha while she was singing in the kitchen doing her thing making sure this meal fit for a king and said, "Hey Martha, do you hear that?" Martha said, "Yes I do. Jesus is relaxing and enjoying his downtime with his disciples and no one to bother him. It's an honor to have the Master and his friends in our home. Stop trying to make something out of nothing. Don't you know Jesus is here? Be gone. Scat." But the Devil persisted. "Martha, listen. Put down that spoon and mixing bowl and listen." Martha stopped what

she was doing, heard the laughter coming from the other room where Jesus was. She thought he had just told a good joke to his disciples.

Satan pokes Martha again and says, “Just crack open the door a little and see what is going on in there.” A hesitant Martha, moves toward the door a little sheepishly, cracks it open and can’t believe her eyes. There at the feet of Jesus, wild-eyed as a teenager goggling over her boyfriend, or over a pop star who had dropped in, was Mary, sitting quietly at the feet of Jesus, her hands resting on his knees, soaking up the stories, laughing along with the disciples as Jesus spoke. Martha begins to fume as she thinks that for over an hour she has been grinding in the kitchen. The guy in the red suit said, “So what do you think Martha? While you’re slaving making a meal, your little sis is in there doing nothing. She’s making points by blinking her eyes at Jesus while you work. Is that fair?” And the more Martha thought about it, the more she was distracted by the sight she had seen and the sounds of laughter still coming from that room, and the more she clanged around in the kitchen until her anger had reached its boiling point and uncharacteristically of her nature, she burst into the room to confront

Mary. I'm sure Jesus could see that anger and turned to Martha and said, "Martha I appreciate your taking time to make a great meal for me. You have blessed me and my friends by your hospitality. Thank you for your care. Forgive Mary for she needed these moments today to be with me. Perhaps some other day you will also. Don't be distracted by what you are doing to honor me and our friendship. Remember why you are doing what you are doing and enjoy it for when you are finished we shall all sit around the table and enjoy the wonderful meal you prepared. We will laugh, cry, share stories, enjoy each other's company and be blessed by our Father in heaven. Mary will help with the dishes, and so will the disciples."

I wish I could say that was what happened, but as you know, that's not what happened in the end. Jesus final words were, "*Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.*" But that other ending could have happened.

One has chosen what is better. One has been distracted by something. You know there are lots of Mary's and Martha's in this world. Some who have chosen wisely and some who start out on the

right track but get distracted by the things in this world. We often get distracted by signs along the road inviting us to stop and get a burger here or there. Come and rest at this place or that. Sometimes we get distracted with cell phone calls or texting while driving which can lead to accidents. Parents can get distracted by kids coming in to ask something while they are on the phone, or making dinner, or visiting with someone else. Remember when the kids were gathering around Jesus and wanted to perhaps hug him or just play a little bit with him the disciples tried to keep them away. But Jesus took a little child on his lap and told them to let the little kids come to him after all, they understand the kingdom of God better than most adults because they trust in Jesus' goodness, not struggle like some adults do with believing and trusting. In our spiritual lives we can get distracted by the things of this world so easy that don't matter, that don't have eternal value. And let me say this, any church that gets distracted from its mission to reach the lost and make disciples for Jesus Christ and focusing on other stuff, is not, let me repeat that, is not doing what God has called it to do.

So there you have it. We have the Martha's who use their gifts of servanthood. And we have the Mary's who sit at the feet to learn. Sometimes we need to be the Mary's who learn to become the Martha's. Sometimes the Marthas need to take time to be the Mary's. God needs both...God uses both.

Who are you today? A Mary? Or a Martha?

I think Jesus might be singing today in heaven about each of us. "I'm getting to know you, getting to know all about you. Getting to like you. Hoping you like me....day, by day."