



Hospitality has its Rewards

Luke 10:38-42

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July 17, 2022

Background Story

Last week our focus was on the Good Samaritan and the hospitality he provided to a stranger. We also acknowledged that we like being in the shoes of the Good Samaritan verses the priest and Levite because, we want to believe that we too could show mercy and compassion to others and offer the best hospitality possible. To be willing to give of ourselves above and beyond is the level of hospitality we are called to.

In our text today we look at hospitality with a slightly different lens. Every sermon I have heard or every Bible study I participated in or led, has always pitted the behaviors of Mary and Martha against each other, one behavior good, the other not so good. Today I want us to try and see this story of two sisters not as gain for one sister over the other, but instead as a gain for both sisters. Hospitality has its rewards.

Engaging the Text

It may be helpful to remind ourselves that in our scripture text two Sundays ago on making disciples, in Luke 10:8 Jesus says to the seventy, as he sends them out, "*Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you;*". In our text today, Martha is named in verse 38 as the woman who welcomed Jesus into her home. But by verse 40 her efforts are cast in a negative light, when the text says that Martha was "*distracted by her many tasks*". It is interesting to note here that the word 'work', in verse 40 is translated from the Greek word "diakonia" which means service. It is where we get the term diaconal ministry or deacon. In the United Methodist Church, a deacon is ordained to word and service.

Luke's interjection of the word 'distracted' creates the tension between Mary and Martha, with Mary seen as doing right for sitting at Jesus' feet and not doing her part, but Martha is doing wrong for being welcoming. The notion of her being distracted suggested that Martha cannot be welcoming and not be physically at the feet of Jesus' listening to the Word of God. First let me say that I take offense at the mere suggestion that women cannot multitask. If anything, she made sitting at Jesus' feet a secondary priority, over the expectation placed on her a woman. Add to that all the social mores that said a women should NOT be sitting in the company of men at Jesus' feet. Socially Martha was right, but spiritually she also needed to be right. It is Mary who is not welcoming but

sitting. And yet Jesus responds to Martha, "... *'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'*"

And yet, here again, Jesus lifts up the one that is a part of the marginalized to be the hero of the story. Last week it was the good Samaritan, this week is Mary, who has "chosen the better part". I in no way intend to dispute the text, instead I want to give those of us, for whom welcoming is a gift, who like to prepare and serve, who love welcoming guests at home and at church – I want to give all of us a pass. We are not the villains in this story, but there is a word for us to heed, actually for all of us to heed. That we as followers of Christ should never allow societal, familial, or cultural norms keep us from the hearing, reading, studying or following the Word of God. There are so many ways and so many reasons to be distracted today. Life is happening all around us and if we want or need to participate in life, we will be distracted. Stuff happens. And the stuff can be overwhelming, but the stuff cannot keep us from the Word of God.

I grew up in a time when we had blue laws in our states. Why do they call them blue laws? Blue laws forbid certain secular activities on Sunday. The name may derive from Samuel A. Peters' General History of Connecticut (1781), which purported to list the stiff Sabbath regulations at New Haven, Connecticut; the work was printed on blue paper. The truth is people went to church on Sunday because the other option was sitting at home. That is how the idea of potlucks and fellowship became such an integral part of church life. The fellowship after church became a place for connection. But today, there is absolutely nothing that you cannot do on a Sunday, except go to Chick-fil-A or Hobby Lobby. And let's be honest some of us have issues with that. But the abolishment of blue laws threw all of us out of the rhythm and understanding of the importance of the Bible in our daily lives. And over time that rhythm and importance has diminished greatly. The consequence of that has been churches that have had knockdown, drag out fights in church council over what type of donuts to have on Sunday, but do not offer any opportunity for Bible study. Some churches, believe that hospitality, not making disciples is the way to grow the church. Friends, we are in a dangerous space in a challenging time. And that's why I wanted to talk about Martha today. If only to say there is nothing wrong with hospitality, but hospitality alone won't get us where we need to be, doing what we need to do.

Without understanding God's Word, we will never be able to offer hospitality in ways that lead people to the Word and ultimately to Christ. We won't have people coming to the faith, growing in their faith, and become mature Christians and Disciples. Instead, we will our churches full of hospitality worshippers, who care more about the donuts than discipleship. I have conversations with churches all the time who talk about how hard they are trying to welcome guests to the church, and I always ask the same question, "What

are you doing to welcome them?" In all the responses I have heard, and that has been many. We have 156 churches here in the NOVA District and I have been doing ministry for more than 20 years, and I can count on one hand how many times the response to my question mentioned sharing the Word of God.

Conclusion

So, look here you Mary and Marthas, you Marty and Martins we as the church have one job, to make disciples of Jesus Christ. And I do not know of a more sure-fire way to do that than with the Word of God. Hospitality does have its rewards. Being able to serve others, welcome others, get to know others, is awesome. But the ultimate reward is not found in a handshake or a cup of fair-trade coffee, it is found in the pages of a book called the Bible, and there's no getting around that. My prayer is that amid the chaos of society we find ways to help others:

- Focus on Christ not cookies
- Focus on the Bible not loaves of bread
- Focus on knowing God instead of knocking on doors
- Focus on being a Christian and not a church attender
- Focus on being a disciple and not a member

Because hospitality does have its rewards when it leads someone to Christ.

May it be so, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.