

## Do You See What Time It Is?

*Sermon based on Luke 10:38-42*

*Preached by Lynette K. Sparks at North Presbyterian Church, July 22, 2007*

**Prayer:** *Living Word, open our minds to understand your teaching. Open our ears to hear your voice. Open our eyes to see your grace. And open our hearts to welcome your presence, that our response might be pleasing to you. In the name of Christ our Lord, Amen.*

*(Knock, knock, knock)* There was a knock at the door. Martha didn't hear it the first time. She was preoccupied with all there was to do. If there had been such a thing as a Protestant work ethic in the first century, she would have fit the bill. Meanwhile, Martha's mind was racing, deep in thought. She'd heard that Jesus and his followers were traveling from village to village. She'd heard that Jesus sent his followers out ahead of him, in pairs to every town and place that he planned to visit. She'd heard that they'd gone from house to house, proclaiming the peace of God's kingdom, seeking to recruit more disciples. She'd heard that they shared meals with whoever welcomed them into their homes. She heard that they cured the sick; and assured their hosts of God's immediate presence. And she'd heard about the villagers who'd received them, and said "yes" to becoming a disciple of Jesus, too; "yes" to embracing God's peace of salvation.

And she remembered how she and her sister Mary found themselves face to face with some of these disciples. And the disciples asked them to embrace Jesus' message. So how could they not join this ministry? The message of peace and salvation was so plain, so clear. And there was so much to do to spread the good news. She and Mary looked at each other, and without even saying it, knew that now their relationship as sisters wasn't just biological. It was more than that. Their sisterhood was now a partnership in ministry, a partnership of service to and for the community of Jesus.

But now, she heard that Jesus had joined the traveling missionaries along the dusty roads, and just yesterday, were in the neighboring village. If only he'd come here ...

*(Knock, knock, knock)* The second knock startled Martha out of her daydream. She quickly smoothed out her robe, hurried to the door, and opened it. And Martha, opened the door to Jesus. "Come in, come in! You must be tired and thirsty. Come in, do you see what time it is? It's late in the day! Come in, rest your weary feet! Come in, have something to eat! Come in and stay a while!"

If Martha had thought her ministry tasks were enormous before this, now she had Jesus himself in her own home. Now there's a meal to make and a guest space to prepare. What food do I have in the house? Do I have enough for guests? And I promised that tomorrow I'd do the rounds, caring for my ill neighbors, and host the local meeting of disciples. Surely Jesus will be glad to hear all we're doing for the kingdom of God, won't he? Oh dear, I'm not sure I can do it all. It's too much. I don't think I can handle this all. Wait a minute. This is a partnership, right? Where's Mary? She's not pulling her weight! I need her help – can't do it without her. There she is, just sitting at Jesus' feet, oblivious to the many tasks, like she's a disciple or something. Doesn't she see what time it is? Doesn't she realize he needs to eat? Besides, this is our Lord! Surely she knows we've got a lot of work to do to spread the message of the man visiting our home!" And so, she hustled on over to Jesus. "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all of the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" And Jesus replied, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things."

Often, our questions, especially to Jesus, mask the real problem. As Warren Carter points out, Martha saw her problem as one of an unequal partnership. Mary didn't do her fair share. She didn't carry her weight. She slacked on the job.

But Jesus, with razor-sharp perception, went right to the fundamental issue: Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. It's not a problem of unequal partnership. It's a problem of anxiety, of worry, of distraction.

Theologian Paul Tillich said that there are so many “concerns in our lives that demand devotion, attention, and passion ... every concern is tyrannical and wants our whole heart and whole mind and whole strength.” It’s true, I think, even when we are acting for a good cause, acting on behalf of Jesus. The tyranny of our concerns oppresses our own lives even as we work to end the oppression of others. We become distracted and worried in spite of our works of discipleship.

It happens even here at North Church, I suspect. Perhaps at the top of our worries right now -- Is the pastor search process ever going to be done? Will our interim period ever end? We have so much work to do, and we’re missing a key partner, a long-term pastor, in this ministry! It makes us worried, distracted. We are worried about all of the work of God’s kingdom that is left to do -- we need a permanent leader, someone that’s going to be around for awhile. And what about that accessibility project we just got a letter about – we need to do it – but how are we ever going to come up with the money? And Vacation Bible School is coming up! We still need volunteers and donations. Member A over there hasn’t done anything; member B has been AWOL. There’s so much to do, but not everyone is doing their share! And we forget to breathe.

In our reading of this Scripture text, there is a tendency for us to try to compare Mary and Martha. We struggle to understand these two women. Which one was more faithful? Are you a Mary, or a Martha? Is it better to be one, or the other? Should we serve or live a contemplative life? Even in our Scripture reading, we become distracted, because we forget that just before Luke tells us the story of Jesus’ visit to these two women, he’s just told the story of the Good Samaritan, the one who served and showed compassion to the unlovely, the one whom Mary Lou George preached about last week. Our fascination with these two contrasting women distracts us from the whole of Jesus’ teaching, which, quite remarkably, is echoed in this story if we listen closely.

Jesus said to the anxious one, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; you need one thing that Mary has found.” And in this one statement, do you hear the words of Jesus to his disciples in Luke 12 (and also in Matthew), “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear ... consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. How much more value are you than the birds! Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ... Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin.”

Can you hear Jesus’ parable of the sower in Luke 8, where he teaches that the seeds that grow and bear fruit are the ones who hear the Word of God and do it – that stopping, sitting at Jesus’ feet, and listening to him is crucial to being a faithful disciple? And can you see all throughout Luke, chapter 10, that stories of active ministry alternate with stories of encounter with God? That in our faithful discipleship, we also need single-minded encounters with God.

Musical storyteller Ken Medema wrote a song, a musical drama, that I heard years ago, telling this familiar tale of two sisters. I wish I had the music for it – I can still remember much, but not all, of the melody. But I did find the lyrics. In Medema’s version, Jesus says, “Martha, you’re worried for so many things. One thing is lacking, which Mary has found, and it will not be taken away. Martha, come join us, your dinner will wait. Soon, I will be gone, and it will be too late. Dinner can wait today ... There’s a time to work without delay. But there’s a time for putting work away. Look around, do you see what time it is? Put down your pots and pans a while.”

Jesus says to you, and to me, “Look around, do you see what time it is – right now? Put down your work a while. Come, sit at my feet, listen a while, talk with me a while, and just be with me a while. I am God At Work. Give me all of your worries and distractions. And then, you can go back to your work.”

I invite you, to try something different with me if you wish. Come, right here, quietly, and sit beside me, in the presence of the living Christ, and spend a minute or two in silence at Jesus’ feet, with some quiet music in the background. If you’re more comfortable, you can remain in your seat. Imagine that Jesus says to you, “Come, and sit here beside me.” What does Jesus say to you, and what do you say to him? Our time of silence will end when Marlene gives us the introduction to our next hymn listed in your bulletin. Look around, do you see what time it is? Come, lay your worries at the feet of Jesus, bask in his presence, and just be with him a while.