

“Jumping to Conclusions”
Sermon delivered 7-18-10
Immanuel Lutheran Church
Neal Collins, Pastor

Luke 10:38–42

Now as [Jesus and his disciples] went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Observation and Assumption

Most of you, when listening to the Gospel, probably immediately made an observation, and assumption about Mary and Martha. Given the story you heard, your observations are likely correct, but your conclusion may be wrong. When we take a small portion of scripture and attempt to make conclusions, we paint ourselves in a corner. Hearing what you have heard (or read) in the Gospel, you probably concluded that Mary, being attentive at the feet of Jesus, is better off than the anxiety of her sister Martha in the kitchen. Now, I am guessing if we did a survey this morning in our congregation, we would conclude at least 90% of us are more like Martha than like Mary. So, it seems a bit simplistic to conclude that we shouldn't be anxious. This is like saying, "don't think about the color red." So, let us unpack this Gospel, and explore the Word of the Lord for our lives this morning by taking a couple steps back and looking at the big picture around our story.

The Gospel this morning is connected to the Gospel from last Sunday - on the Good Samaritan. The lawyer approached Jesus with a test by questioning him about what he must do to inherit eternal life and Jesus responds with a question about what is written in the law. The lawyer says "Love the Lord your God with all your _____, _____, and _____ (heart, mind, and soul) and your _____ (neighbor) as _____ (yourself). The lawyer questioned, "who is my neighbor" and Jesus tells a story about the Good Samaritan. The Gospel this morning fits into first part of Jesus response about eternal life with loving God. The second part, of loving your neighbor, relates to the Lawyer who questioned Jesus, and also to Martha, who wants Jesus to tell Mary to get out in the kitchen. So, by connecting the two parts, we can see and different picture and draw a new conclusion.

Questions for ourselves

The commandment begins with loving the Lord, and then loving the neighbor. When we reverse the order, asking, “who is my neighbor”, or build our cases like Martha built her case with resentment against Mary while sweating it out in the kitchen. This is not just about believing in the Lord, there is so much more in the fabric of this story. The temptation is to make loving the Lord into one more thing we must be anxious about, with questions like “Do I love the Lord enough?” What does it mean to love the Lord your God? We used to think it meant to do good things, and the Lord is happy with us because of our acts, but we can’t make that conclusion with this Gospel in the context of the big picture.

I wonder if most of you sitting here this morning are thinking about what you must do for eternal life? I suspect you have questions. Last Friday night I attended the Krista Tippet presentation. One of the things she said was, “We all come with questions. What is important to me? What do I need? Why am I here? What do I need to do? What is my purpose?” We, like the lawyer, are questioning and exploring our lives and the depth of our souls.

Distractions

We understand the Lawyer and Martha in these stories. We can relate to these two folks and their distractions. Who of us today doesn’t understand the Lawyer’s attempt to get things nailed down? It takes a lot of work to do what they are doing, and distraction seems to be inevitable. Who can cast the first stone? The question is not, “are you distracted and anxious?” but what is distracting you? Why are you anxious? We are a people like Martha, who is preoccupied doing, fixing, taking care of, planning, driving, serving, helping, and running. Even if it is in the wrong direction, we are all active and busy. We have an immediate response when someone asks us what are you doing. Are we overwhelmed? Aren’t we proud of our ability to do many different things? We call this multi-tasking as a response to the urgency of our lives, and are proud of it. We are not just Mark and Martha’s, but Super Mark’s and Super Martha’s. On one level this is cool - to be faster than a locomotive or a speeding bullet, but at what price? What price are we paying by moving faster and jumping higher as a people and as a society? Jesus doesn’t say Martha should stop, but is concerned about the anxiety she carries with her actions.

Busy or Spiritual?

I am troubled by this text when Jesus turns and tells Martha that Mary has chosen the better part. Better part of what? She just sits and listens, while Martha is sweating in the kitchen. Like the story of the Elder Brother and the 11th hour workers, it’s just not fair for us Mark and Martha’s of the world. What is this about? Stop being so busy and be more spiritual like Mary? Who is going to be concerned about the homeless if the Boise Rescue Mission converted to being like Mary? Where are the hungry going to go if the Food Banks just sit in Bible Study all day? We cannot neatly separate the two camps as being either/or.

When we look at the big picture, beginning with the question, “what must we do to inherit eternal life?” I know eternal life is relegated in the minds of many of us to be about the future. This is sad because the kingdom of God has broken into our lives in Jesus. God is present with you. If God is present in our lives, then we have eternal life now, today. The Lord is with you. You are living in the eternal reign of God, eternity is in the present tense.

Stop and Question

Stop, pause, and question, what is God’s will in the big picture of what you are facing this morning? Jesus addressed his disciples to be hearer’s and doer’s of his Word. This recognizes God’s presence in our lives. When we ask questions because we are “sitting at the feet”, as Mary sat with Jesus, we are seeing God as part of our being, as opposed to being just the man in the galaxy or the universe out there somewhere.

Let us modify this Gospel for a minute. Let us put you in the place of Mary. You are sitting at the feet of Jesus. In your minds eye, what would Jesus be saying to you? What questions do you ask? This is a crucial question because this is what it means to love the Lord. It is to bring our questions in prayer, and to listen.

One chaplain, responding to a group of University students who were doing marvelous deeds and acts of love said, “If you do not have some vision of what God is doing to repair creation, you can’t get up everyday and work in the soup kitchen, it finally beats you down. If you don’t have a vision (which you get by pausing, questioning, and examining) and are grounded in the love of God (as Mary), it will make you cynical, bitter, and resentful (like Martha). You will become distracted and anxious.”

As a people of wholeness, you need the heart of Mary, and the action of Martha, to experience eternal life. Recognizing the presence of God in your life - you want this experience. God wants you to recognize, to know, and to experience this love Today.