

## Sermon for Trinity 8

[Amos 8:1-12](#); [Psalm 52](#); [Colossians 1:15-28](#); [Luke 10:38-42](#)

All of us have been invited into the homes of friends, and have entertained friends in our own homes. Think for a moment of going to visit good friends who have truly made you welcome. They say to you, “Make yourself at home”, and you know that they mean it. All of you gather around a table or a meal of fellowship, and laugh and talk about old times, talk about what’s going on in the world today, share joys, speak of disappointments – in other words *you connect*. When the experience is over, we leave those friends with a great sense of richness both for them and in ourselves. You and they have heard and experienced much. And because of your sincere openness you have learned much about one another. You even have a bounce to your step because you were able to be real with one another, and because of that you can face the world. You have had *a real community-building encounter*.

Then there are those friends who are quite *fussy* about all that has to be done. Every “doily” on the table must be just right. You sit uncomfortably, not knowing where to put your hands lest you break some prized possession! And while you may appreciate the care, how much nicer things would if they were to let go of their hang ups and just be real.

Today we have heard a brief story about the day Jesus called on Martha. She opened the door to him and then in a fluster abandoned him to her sister Mary. When she then resents the situation she finds herself in, Jesus delivers the punch line: “*Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted about many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, and it shall not be taken from her.*”

Everything, therefore, hangs on the one thing that Jesus mentions, the one thing that Mary has chosen and apparently her sister, Martha, has not.

At first it looks as though the one thing that is necessary is to sit at Jesus’ feet, to assume a disciple’s posture; above something so useful as bustling about to make your guests feel at home.

It is even possible to set up the two sisters Martha and Mary as examples of different vocations. Mary the contemplative, lucky enough to be able to devote herself to prayer, to spiritual practice. Martha, on the other hand, seems like the rest of us, who struggle with the demands of life in the world, praying on the run, if at all.

The distinction between Mary and Martha, contemplation and action, prayer and service, comes across as a tidy distinction. But life is rarely neat. Issues of faith are rarely simple.

No, something more is involved here. The story of Jesus as a guest in the home of these women does not justify dividing believers into two classes: spiritual aristocrats and the rest of us. Instead, it challenges all of us, and does so in a way that need not separate us from each other.

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In this passage of Scripture, we are called to be open to doing some very radical work in the world in a simple gesture of hospitality.

Jesus does not deny the value of what Martha is or of what she is doing. He does not say to her that everything is all right and that there is nothing to do or to worry about. He says to her, instead that she has her priorities wrong. He recognizes that Mary knows that she has something to learn from him, and he would like Martha to know that as well. He seems to be saying to Martha: “Don’t just do something, sit here, at least for a moment. Listen to me.” She had opened the door to him, and now he wants her to let her mind and soul catch up with her body.

The Marthas of the world are so busy doing good and necessary things that sometimes they don’t have time to realize how deeply they themselves stand in need. When Jesus comes to us, he reminds us that we need the grace and peace he offers. Rather than be distracted by providing service, or being anxious and troubled about many things, we would do well to slow the dance we are doing, to stop, look, and listen.

This, then, is a parable about giving and receiving, doing and being, and about the presence of Jesus in the midst of the ordinary that becomes extraordinary. It is a parable about priorities, first things first, and it is a parable about two women who in their lives and attitudes give our Lord and his Church an opportunity to teach an important lesson for our time. It is also a parable of our worship, for it reminds us that what happens in our churches – our prayer, our praise, our instruction, and our fellowship – is not what *we* do for Jesus, entertaining him and busying ourselves with some sort of fast dance

It is a parable too for the Church, the business of doing over against the process of being.

We are called to make the door of our home—the Church—wide open to all. We are to invite all: those with tattered finery; those older; those younger; those female; those male; those heterosexual; those lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender; those white, those brown, black, and red—and everything in between; those who are well physically and those who live with physical challenges. In the process, with all at the table, we will hear much and learn much. The Kingdom will come down many times over, and we will realize that *we have chosen the better part*, and because of our hospitality we will never be the same again.

We are more likely to encounter the grace of God through our hospitality.

*(Kieran O’Mahony writes) “Hospitality is a key value in the Bible and in the Ancient Near East. In spite of all the cultural changes we experience, welcoming people into our homes is still a fundamental value among us today, with lots of unsaid “rules” and conventions. A thesaurus expansion of the word “hospitality” takes us into the experience at its best: friendliness, hospitableness, welcome, warm reception, helpfulness, neighbourliness, warmth, warm-heartedness, kindness, kind-heartedness, congeniality, geniality, sociability, conviviality, cordiality, generosity, open-handedness.*

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*(he continues) It is a significant thing to welcome someone to your table. This is so embedded in us humans that Jesus himself was able to use it as a symbol of the kingdom. Hospitality works, as we all know, when people somehow go beyond the conventions and the necessary preparations etc. and actually “connect.” Even though Martha’s gripe is perfectly understandable, Mary really does connect and, on account of that, has indeed chosen the better part.”*

Only one thing really matters in the hurly-burly of our modern world, that we always make space for God in our lives, that we reach out and grasp the message which God is continually presenting to us, that we make it our own, and that we allow it to guide and shape us, as we live and as we hope to die, in fulfillment of God’s wishes for us.

We have in this story about Martha and Mary a whole theology of contemplation, **of how to receive the Lord’s visit.** It starts off from the basis that, no matter who our visitors may be, there is always something to be learned, something to be gained from them. The one who comes knocking on our door will have something to tell us, should be listened to and understood. After a demanding and frustrating confrontation with today’s scribes and Pharisees, Jesus comes to visit his friends, in an atmosphere of ease. He comes to talk to us in the quiet of the evening or the freshness of the morning, to share with us the Word that brings us to salvation. He comes not because he needs us but because we need him. We too can be “distracted with all the serving;” we too can “worry and fret about so many things.” We may, like Martha, miss the better part, the one thing necessary, which is to submit to the Word of Christ.

The world is made up of Martha’s and Mary’s” the doers and the dreamers ?” and it would seem the former are far more numerous than the latter. Our busy society places a huge premium on achievement. It is results that count. Targets are set for production and sales and only those who achieve or surpass them are rewarded. Captains of industry everywhere are pushing hard to have pay related to production. Their message is “shape up or ship out.” And those who can’t or won’t are made redundant. We live in Martha’s world.

It is ironic that Christ’s followers so seldom show **his** marked preference for the Marys of this world. They toiled away in their garrets, often in poverty, elaborating their dreams and bringing to birth a better world for future generations. Mercifully, we still have our dreamers. The message of today’s gospel is that we, like our Master, should cherish such dreamers. It is the poets and prophets, writers and thinkers, philosophers and mystics, who like Mary, have chosen the better part.

The important thing is to understand that we are called to hospitality, it is important, and we must answer it when it comes whether we are comfortable inside our homes or away from home. If our home isn't ready, our heart should be. Christian hospitality isn't just a Christian serving others from their homes or their churches... it is serving Christ Jesus from their hearts. We are called to more excellent ways by a most excellent example... **our Lord’s!!**

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Acknowledgements:

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