

# Sermon: Pentecost 9

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Year C  
Genesis 18:1-10a  
Psalm 15  
Colossians 1:15-28  
Luke 10:38-42

Sometimes... when I'm at the kitchen sink... I realize that we need some more paper towels... so when I can... I go downstairs to the garage to get some... and on the way... I may see something that needs to be put away... so I do that... and I may realize that some laundry needs to be started... so I do that... and I may see some books that need to be organized... so I do that... I had become distracted by other things... and then I head back upstairs... without the paper towels...

But when we think about doing and being... we must remember that multi-tasking is a myth... our brain can only do one thing at a time... we can have four pots on the stove... but can attend to only one at a time... and sometimes... when we're tending to one thing... something else will burn... and one of the more bothersome things I've done... is put on a pot of water for tea... and then got so distracted I forgot I was boiling water... and the pot burned so badly that scrubbing pads didn't even have a chance...

When we think about doing and being... when we think about Martha and Mary... most of us side unfairly with Mary... she sits at the Master's feet... given our hindsight... isn't that where we'd rather be... we side unfairly with Mary... not because of what Jesus said... but because of how biblical scholars have translated what Jesus said... when we read the text as: *Mary has chosen the better part*... it helps to know that what's actually written in the Greek is: *Mary has chosen the good part*... certainly no worse than what Martha has chosen... different maybe... but the text does not say better...

And what's so interesting... is that although we seem to praise Mary's choice... too many of us insist that everyone act like Martha... we seem to like that Mary sat at Jesus' feet... but we value busy-ness... a completed "to-do" list... we like producers that

produce and consumers that consume... when do we ever really support reflection... introspection... we tend to equate contemplation with laziness... when do we lift up the kind of monastic silence that allowed Mary to listen to Jesus...

In Genesis... strangers come off the hot... dry road... and accept hospitality... Abraham says... in kind of a Jewish way... let me bring a little bread... but by the time he serves them... there are cakes made with choice flour... and curds... and milk... and meat... this was before kosher food laws... and these strangers... become hosts... making the most stunning promises... about new life for Sarah and Abraham...

In our Gospel lesson... Jesus arrives as a guest... Fred Niedner wrote... he has just set his face towards Jerusalem... he is welcomed into Martha's home... this is not his last supper... but it is likely one of his last... and although he arrives as a guest... he becomes a host... serving up the meal which Mary receives... but which Martha can't sit down to enjoy... she's so busy banging the china around... and when you're facing this kind of reality... and you accept someone's hospitality... do you really want them off in the kitchen... seemingly disinterested in what's going on in your life... or do you want them to sit and be quiet and listen to what's on your heart and mind...

During Mark's last week with us... I was able to... was fortunate enough to... spend some time with him... he had set his face to his own kind of Jerusalem... and I got the chance to be Mary... listening to what was on his heart and mind... to the wrapping-it-up work he wanted... maybe needed... to do... I was a guest in his home... but in some ways I hosted his soul... being a witness to the stories he told and the connections he made... to his smile... and his laughter... and a few healthy tears...

You all know I like words... and the biblical word *xenos*... means host... and guest... as well as stranger... and *xenophilia*... means the love of hosting... just as the opposite word... *xenophobia*... means fear of the stranger...

So Martha and Mary and Jesus were all *xenos*... and Martha was banging pots and pans in the kitchen... we don't know whether Mary was taking advantage of a singular opportunity to sit at Jesus' feet... or whether she was always unwilling to help her sister... but Martha is here [left]... Mary is here [right]...

Martha is absorbed in the mundane daily chores that feed the body... Mary is absorbed in the underlying ephemeral reality that feeds the soul... but when we think of what happened in the movie *Babette's Feast*... and why... when we think of what happens at this Table... we ought not judge anyone for wanting to lay out a nice spread...

And we ought not judge anyone for sitting at Jesus' feet... for seeking the thin place that allows us to delve into the mysterious silence that is God... and one practice of hospitality that many monasteries follow... is that every time someone knocks at the door... they respond as though that person is the Christ...

But these two women are really two sides of the same coin... though our western mindset makes it more challenging I think... to get our heads around how complementary they really are... Roman Catholic priest John Shea uses a story from the Hindu tradition to help us understand this Martha-Mary consciousness...

There was a King named Akbar... who had a brilliant and clever prime minister... named Birbal... One day Akbar asked Birbal if he could bring him someone who is Here [down] and not There [up]... Birbal brought him a thief... saying... *This thief is only in the world trying to get money and goods to increase his wealth Here...*

Then Akbar told Birbal... *Bring me someone who is There and not Here...* Birbal responded by bringing a wandering ascetic... and said... *He completely neglects all aspects of this world... including his body and his well-being... to focus entirely on the world beyond... on There...*

*Now... said Akbar... Bring me someone who is neither Here nor There... Birbal thought for a while and returned with a beggar... saying... This man is not Here... for he is always envious of everyone else in the world... he is not participating in the world in any sense... but then... at the same time... he has no concern for spiritual matters... thus he is in no way There either... he is neither Here nor There...*

*Now... said Akbar... is it possible that there is anyone in the world who is both Here and There... Yes... your majesty... answered Birbal... and he brought forth an honest householder couple... This man and woman work in the world and tend to their family... but do everything with God in their thoughts... therefore they are both Here and There...*

*Very good... said Akbar... and immediately began to think about the next challenge he would give to Birbal...*

I may have told this before... but in many places around the world, when they dye cloth... they'll soak it in a vat of color... and then hang it out in the sun to dry... and as it dries... almost all of the color may fade... and all that's left is just a hint of color... so they soak it in the vat again... and hang it in the sun to dry... and this is repeated over and over again... as many times as it takes... until the fabric undergoes a journey of transformation... when the color on the dried sun-bleached fabric is the same as it is in the vat... until it becomes color-fast...

When we have been reborn from above... when our identity comes to us from the Ground of our Being... when our consciousness cannot be overshadowed or faded by the changes and chances of the world... then we are able to fully be Marthas... while always feeling like Marys... then we become like a silent witness while engaged in dynamic activity... then we move into the mind of Christ... and are unshakable... O God make haste to help us...

Mike+