

17 July 2022 Luke 10:38-42; Pastor Fraser Pearce

Today I'm proclaiming Good News from God's word:  
When we welcome the Lord into our lives,  
He willingly comes to be with us,  
He sees our acts of service, our acts of devotion to him:  
He is not an unappreciative guest.  
But he calls each of us by name to remember as we serve  
That he has come to us primarily not so that we may serve him,  
But so that he may serve us:  
So that he may give us his word to free us from justifying ourselves,  
And to free us to live at peace with our brothers and sisters.

Before we get into today's reading,  
Let's first remember the direct context, what's come before.  
If you look in your Bibles you'll see that we've just heard  
The Parable of the Good Samaritan:  
The parable that Jesus told to the lawyer  
When he was wanting to justify himself.  
That parable had the theme of compassion  
That showed itself in action,  
And Jesus last words to the lawyer: 'Go and do likewise'  
Are presented as a challenge to lawyer who evidently  
Wanted to water down God's law so that he could,  
By his own strength, keep it;  
Or at least keep it better than other people.

Now the scene changes; listen to how our reading begins: **Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.**

On the one hand we hear that Jesus and his disciples are on their way,  
In fact we know from earlier in Luke  
That they are on their way to Jerusalem,  
To the place where Jesus will suffer and die,  
And rise from death into the resurrected life.

But in today's narrative the focus narrows,  
And at first we have pictured for us Jesus,  
And a certain woman from a certain village,  
That is, it doesn't particularly matter *where* the village is  
For the sake of the narrative,  
But it does matter who the woman is, because she is named: Martha.  
Keep this name in your mind, because it's going to become significant  
As the narrative develops.

Now Martha welcomes Jesus:  
She is pictured as taking the initiative,  
Of making the step to have Jesus as a guest in her home.

Now the text doesn't say why she asked, or why Jesus accepted.  
We are invited to pause and think about it.

What we gather from the Gospel is that Jesus is a man  
In the prime of life, evidently unmarried, and with some fame.  
Martha is a woman, also, as the text goes on to suggest, unmarried,  
Who has invited Jesus into her home.

Why might an available young woman  
Invite an available young man into her home?  
Is it possible that there is what we might call  
A romantic undercurrent at play here?  
If not, what would you say is going on?  
There are, after all, different possibilities,  
And we chew on the text as we think about these things.

OK, the plot thickens: **[Martha] had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying.**

Literally, she was listening to his *word*.

So we find out that Martha welcoming Jesus  
Also means introducing Jesus to her sister, Mary.

Mary is, evidently, taken with Jesus,  
She is interested in him.

More than this, the text says that she sat at his feet,  
That is, she put herself in the position of a disciple, of a student.

More than this, she listened to his word.

Now we know from earlier in Luke's Gospel that for Jesus listening to his word was a big deal.

So in Luke 8 we hear these words: [Jesus] said to them, **'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.'** Luke 8:21

Martha has welcomed Jesus as a guest, Mary welcomes him  
As one who speaks the word,  
She welcomes him as a disciple.

Now the narrative develops further: **But 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.'**

Our translation says that Martha was distracted  
By her many tasks, and this can make it sound that she was simply  
Run off her feet getting things prepared in the kitchen.  
But, for what it's worth, the Greek for 'many tasks'  
Could be translated 'much service',  
And that word 'service', in the Greek, is diakonia  
Does that sound familiar? Our word 'deacon' comes from it.  
Now diakonia can mean things like table service  
But it also the meaning of service to the Lord,  
Service in the church, and I think we are meant to hear this:  
That Martha is not simply serving a meal,  
But that she is serving the Lord.

But she has a grievance.

Who does she have the grievance with?

We could say it's with Mary, who, after all,  
Is not helping with the meal, but sitting at Jesus' feet.

But if her grievance is primarily with Mary,  
Then why doesn't she speak to Mary, do you think?  
Martha, the text makes clear, goes to Jesus.

Our translation says she came to him,

A literal translation could say that she stood,  
And, we could add for colour,  
That she stood with her hands on her hips, and said: **'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.'**

Now she ostensibly addresses Jesus with a title of respect, 'Lord', but is something else going on here?  
After all, if my wife Margaret came out of the kitchen, While we had guests and while she was preparing a meal, And if she stood right beside me and called me 'Pastor' I might rightly think I'm about to get a serve of a less tasty variety.  
Now Martha asks Jesus if he doesn't care about her situation. I think that Martha is yes, angry, with Mary hogging her guest, But I think Martha is more angry that Jesus is willing to go along with it, That Jesus seems to have a preference for Mary That is shown in his evident blindness to Martha's service.  
Maybe there romantic disappointment at work her, Maybe there's a test by Martha of Jesus interest in her.  
At least these are possibilities from my side. What do you think?  
What we know from the text is that Martha then gives Jesus an order: She commands him to tell Mary to help her.

Let's pause here.

Why did Martha welcome Jesus into her life?

Why do we welcome Jesus into our lives?

Do we welcome him to develop grievances toward him,

As we angrily meditate on the way he overlooks our service,

And seems to give preferential treatment to others?

Do we welcome him so that we may give him orders

About what he should be doing for us,

Rather than receiving his service, his word to us?

This narrative invites these questions.

But listen to how the text goes on: **But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha,**

OK, let's again pause.

How does Jesus answer Martha? By calling her by name?

Just by calling her by name? no.

He uses her name *twice*.

Now we could think that this is a sign of exasperation with her,

But is that how things work in Scripture?

In Luke and Acts does the Lord elsewhere call people by name

In the same way?

Yes, he says 'Simon, Simon' when he calls St Peter onto the path

Of strengthening his brothers after the resurrection.

And he says 'Saul, Saul' as he calls St Paul away from persecution

And on the path of apostleship in the church.

And go back to the Old Testament,

Do you remember that the Lord calls 'Moses, Moses'

Out of the burning bush?

Or that the Lord calls 'Abraham, Abraham' to the Father of many,

Or that the Lord calls 'Samuel, Samuel' to the boy in the temple.

I think that in the Lord's use of Martha's name we are invited to hear

Both an affirmation of her act of service,

But also a call from him to her

On what their relationship is meant to be:

That the Lord has received her invitation into her life

Not primarily to be served by her,

But to serve her, to give her his word, to give her life.

Again, **But the Lord answered her, '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.'**

Jesus has noticed Martha, he has noticed her service,

He knows her and loves her and calls her by name,

And calls he by name, 'Martha, Martha' into discipleship,

So that she, like Mary, like all who receive Jesus' word,

Can live truly fruitful lives of Christian love.

When Jesus gave his interpretation of the Parable of the Sower

As it is recorded in Luke's Gospel, he closes with these words: But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance. Luke 8:15

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,  
Our Lord comes to us to serve us with his word,  
Especially the word of peace: the word of forgiveness in his name.  
So let us hold his word with honest and good hearts:  
Admitting when we fail,  
In humility being guided by his word,  
And enduring patiently the trials of this life,  
Knowing that the Lord is growing in us fruit that will last.  
In Jesus' name. Amen.