

**Homily, St. Andrew's
Proper 16C, July 17, 2016
Luke 10:38-42**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

What a difference a week makes! Last Sunday we heard the Gospel story of the Good Samaritan... a story about discipleship through active service to neighbours in need, ending with the command to "go and do likewise." Today we hear the very next story in Luke's Gospel, the story of sisters Mary and Martha welcoming Jesus into their home, and it seems to have the very opposite message. It is not busy and hard-working Martha who is praised but rather her sister Mary, who is sitting at Jesus' feet, listening and learning. Taken together, the two stories offer an interesting juxtaposition of what it means to be disciples of Christ.

Both stories are introduced by a lawyer questioning Jesus about what one must do to inherit eternal life. The correct answer the lawyer gives to his own question, when prompted by Jesus, comes from the Torah: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." The lawyer goes on to ask a follow-up question focussing on the second half of the commandment: "Who is my neighbour?" And Jesus responds with the story of the Good Samaritan, highlighting an outsider as the hero and the model of good discipleship.

With this teaching, the interaction with the lawyer comes to an end and Jesus and his closest friends continuing on their way. The lawyer never asks for further explanation about the first part of the Shema... the command to love God with all of who we are: body, mind, heart and soul. I wonder if he figured he already knew all about that part? We can't know. But, reading the stories together, it seems that the Gospel-writer didn't choose to just leave it at that.

Jesus and the gang enter the next village where Martha welcomes them into her home and gets busy with the normal and expected tasks of hospitality. Instead of helping out, her sister Mary sits at Jesus' feet and listens to what he is saying. The scene depicts an ancient way of learning from a master and Mary is acting like a disciple. This is a role and a position that, at the time, was open only to men. So while it may not seem like a big deal to us, in the context of her time, Mary's action of sitting and listening as a disciple of Jesus violates a clear social boundary and it means she is abandoning the social role she is assigned. It is no wonder her sister Martha is so frustrated, even angry. She had every right to be for not only is she left with all the work of cooking and caring for guests, but Mary is acting against convention, violating social norms, and in doing so could bring shame or other difficulties to the whole family.

It is no wonder that Martha protests against Mary's behaviour and asks Jesus to set things straight: "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." Martha appeals to Jesus to admonish Mary for her gall, her transgression of boundaries, and to follow convention, to restore the appropriate and expected social roles. Instead, Jesus admonishes Martha and affirms Mary's choice and Mary's action: "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." First we had an exemplary example of discipleship in a Samaritan... now we have exemplary discipleship in a woman. What is the world coming to?!? What is this Jesus up to?

There are many this week who have asked what the church is coming to and wondered what Jesus is up to. Many of you will have heard news about events at our General Synod. After several hours of debate on Monday about a resolution to amend our marriage canon to allow same-sex couples to be married, the vote failed to reach a 2/3's majority in the houses of clergy by one vote. This meant that though roughly 70% of the aggregate total voted in favour, the motion failed. When the results were reviewed the next day, an error was discovered in that one of the electronic vote clickers was incorrectly coded. This meant that one clergy vote had not been included and with that one additional vote in favour, the necessary 2/3's majority in the house of clergy was reached, and the motion was declared carried. This was the first reading of an amendment to our canons that to be put into effect, must also pass, with a 2/3's majority in all 3 houses, a second reading at the next meeting of the General Synod in 2019. No matter what happened this week, the results of this particular vote were going to be painful for somebody. It is very, very unfortunate that an administrative error only made it more so for everybody, but there is no reason to believe there was any maleficence, any fraud or deception in the discovery of the error, in the correcting of it or in the subsequent declaration of the motion carried.

There has been much reaction to these developments and there remains many questions about what happens next? Most, if not all, of our bishops across the country have released pastoral letters addressing the specific circumstances of their diocese. Archbishop Greg is no exception. I'm sorry that I received his letter too late to include it in At-a-Glance. [I will / have sent it out this morning by email but...] There are hard copies available in the narthex today. That said, I'd like to share the end of the letter, as he speaks particularly to what it means here in Calgary:

“... After this first vote on the amendment the matter is referred to dioceses and provinces for study and comment. In the Diocese of Calgary we have already begun a Generous Listening process of discernment on the issue of Same Sex Blessings, much of which is also applicable to the Same Sex Marriage discussion. We will be continuing that process in the coming months. I ask your prayers for the Anglican Church of Canada, for all whose lives are affected by this process and for your sisters and brothers in Christ in this diocese - that we may with prayerfulness and gentleness, compassion and faithfulness engage together and bear witness before our broken world to Christ's love in our midst.”

As Bishop Greg notes, the passing of this motion encourages dioceses to engage in further discernment. Action has been taken and now it's again time to listen and learn before we decide on the next course of action. We have already made a good start at it here at St. Andrew's with our discernment process this spring about same-sex blessings. Within our diocese, and in light of today's Gospel story of Mary sitting at Jesus' feet to listen, it seems altogether appropriate that our process of discernment has been titled “Generous Listening.”

In our Gospel story today, Mary lays aside everything else to attend to Jesus' teaching, to sit and listen at his feet. If this is an example of discipleship that we are meant to follow, if Mary's act of defiance to convention in taking a place that wasn't her's to hear Jesus teach exemplifies the love of God in heart, mind, soul and body, how do we do likewise? Perhaps the most important place to start is to note that Mary was not alone in her attentiveness to Jesus' teaching. Mary was the source of contention and conversation because she was out of place, but Jesus was travelling with companions who we should assume were also there. As we look around

at our travelling companions in this journey of faith, perhaps we too need to notice who is out of place... who are those we don't expect to be in our company? Perhaps it is those voices we most need to hear from... the outsiders who Jesus deem the example of discipleship.

Christian discernment is never a solitary activity. Holy and generous listening requires, at a minimum, at least one conversation partner. We can't listen if others won't speak. And others can't listen if we don't speak. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, it was in the gathering of the faithful that the Risen Christ was experienced. As the earliest Christians worked to understand what was going on, they named the church as the Body of Christ. It is in gathering together in prayer, not just as silent and solitary worshippers, but in conversation and community and communion, by talking and listening in turn, that the voice of Christ is discerned. This includes reading the bible, of course, just not in isolation. Conversation with others in the church and beyond, about what scripture says, what our tradition has been and what we each experience of God, is how we sit at Jesus feet and listen, today. This takes commitment on everyone's part to be both gracious and courageous, knowing that everyone in the community has a role to play, everyone has a voice that matters and everyone is a beloved child of God.

May we hear the teaching of Jesus anew, in quietness and contemplation, in conversation and shared worship, in loving service and generous listening.

May we honour those whose faithful love of God causes them to defy social norms and cross social boundaries in their desire to be closer to Christ.

May we remember that the fullness of discipleship requires our humble yet courageous obedience in loving our neighbours as ourselves and in loving God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with our whole bodies.