

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, AUGUST 21, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

21st SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: God is good and loving to the faithful.
All: **Give thanks and praise for all that God has done for us.**
One: God is good!
All: **Praise the Lord!**

***OPENING HYMN** “Praise the Lord! God’s Glories Show” GtG 33

- 1. Praise the Lord! God's glories show, Alleluia!
saints within God's courts below, Alleluia!
angels round the throne above, Alleluia!
all who see and share God's love. Alleluia!**
- 2. Earth to heaven exalt the strain, Alleluia!
Send it, heaven, to earth again, Alleluia!
Age to age, God's mercies trace, Alleluia!
Praise God's providence and grace! Alleluia!**
- 3. Strings and voices, hands and hearts, Alleluia!
in the concert, bear your parts, Alleluia!
All that breathes, your Lord adore, Alleluia!
singing praise forevermore, Alleluia!**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God, we confess that we have been distracted with many things and have not loved you with our whole heart and strength. We have not paid attention to your Word. We have allowed the poor to be neglected and the weak to be oppressed. We have been impatient in worship and insincere in our dealings with others. We have ignored signs of injustice and disregarded warnings of judgment. Forgive us, we pray, and teach us repentance. Free us from our habits of pride, and make us steadfast in faith, that we may live as those who are reconciled with you in Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Though we were once estranged,
All: **in Jesus Christ we have been reconciled with God.**
One: Rejoice in the redemption God provides!
All: **Now we can live in peace!**
 Now we can live thankfully!
One: For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven!
All: **Thanks be to God!**

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.
All: **And also with you.**

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Luke 10:38-42

LUKE 10:38-42 (Common English Bible)

³⁸ While Jesus and his disciples were traveling, Jesus entered a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him as a guest. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his message. ⁴⁰ By contrast, Martha was preoccupied with getting everything ready for their meal. So Martha came to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to prepare the table all by myself? Tell her to help me."

⁴¹ The Lord answered, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. ⁴² One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part. It will not be taken away from her."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Distracted and Divided” by Pastor Bill Vincent

“Tastes great!”
“Less filling!”
“Tastes great!”
“Less filling!”

You may remember this commercial from a number of years ago: Two groups touting seemingly opposing virtues of a particular beverage. When actually the dichotomy was artificial, and they had both missed the point.

We have a similar situation in our passage this morning.

Often this passage has been used to set up a contrast – artificial in its way – and force a choice.

People see Martha busy working in the kitchen and think she represents those doers and activists in our midst. Then they look at Mary and think she represents those more contemplative, reflective people among us. And when they hear Jesus chide Martha and point to Mary, they think he is siding with the contemplative and reflective way of life as opposed to the activist way of life.

But both ways can be “*distracted by many things.*”
Is there a focus that unites us...and our efforts?

You see, Jesus addresses not Martha’s service (which is, in its way, commendable), but her distraction (which is disturbing, even though understandable).

I think I could identify with Martha one Friday evening.

We were new to the community at that time. I had been invited to join in with a Habitat for Humanity workday on Saturday. I had done this before at other times, but never done it in this particular community. I didn’t know who would be there. I didn’t know what other people’s skill levels would be (compared to mine). I could be in over my head. And I thought to myself, “I just hope I don’t make a fool of myself.”

And then it hit me: that’s Martha’s mistake. Anxious, worried, concerned about other things – concerned about me.

When the real focus is supposed to be helping and serving others, serving my Lord.

Notice how, in her distraction and worry, Martha’s focus is on...herself.

“*Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to prepare the table all by myself? Tell her to help me.”*

Our distraction – our worry, our upset – divides our focus and conquers our focus; or, at the very least, misdirects our focus, confuses our focus; and lands us on the wrong things.

For if we are “*pre-occupied...by many things,*” then we cannot be ‘occupied’ with the “*One thing [which] is necessary.*”

Presbyterian pastor, Cynthia A. Jarvis, writes,

A church that has been led to be "worried and distracted by many things" (v. 41) inevitably will be a community that dwells in the shallows of frantic potlucks, anxious stewardship campaigns, and events designed simply to perpetuate the institution. Decisions will be made in meetings without a hint of God's reign. Food and drink will appear at table without Christ being recognized in the breaking of bread. Social issues may be addressed, but the gospel is missed in acts that partake of politics as usual.

...When anxiety in well-doing becomes the measure of our hospitality, then the church has forgotten the One whom it has been gathered to serve.

...

This often leads a congregation to get downright ornery. [Time] after [time], members leave home to crank out the church and return as clueless and empty as they were when they walked out the door. Endless meetings breed resentment in otherwise pleasant Christians because the church's business is being done without any word of the God whom they thought they had agreed to serve. Martha comes to mind. (*Feasting on the Word*, “Pastoral Perspective”)

So we gather on Sunday morning for worship...and cannot stop wondering what we're going to do for lunch.

We gather for meetings, tasks, and projects...and worry about the time and the bother.

And we meet for a church potluck...and share nothing but food.

“Martha comes to mind.”

Maybe Brother Lawrence should also come to mind.

In a monastery in Paris, in the 17th century, Brother Lawrence worked for 30 years as the community's cook.

For him prayer consist[ed] of finding God through everyday events and in learning to trust [God's] providence, so that the soul [became] constantly aware of God's presence. (The HarperCollins Book of Prayers: A Treasury of Prayers Through the Ages, compiled by Robert Van de Weyer, 1993)

The following prayer embodies his stance:

PRAYER BEFORE WORK

My God, you are always close to me. In obedience to you, I must now apply myself to outward things. Yet, as I do so, I pray that you will give me the grace of your presence. And to this end I ask that you will assist my work, receive its fruits as an offering to you, and all the while direct all my affections to you. (Ibid.)

Martha was so busy, even with the details, that her practice of hospitality was eclipsing the purpose of her hospitality (Matthew L. Skinner, *Feasting on the Word*, “Exegetical Perspective”).

She was so overwhelmed by the service of her calling that she overlooked the one she was called to serve.

Besides Brother Lawrence, we may be helped in our focus by a focus of our tradition: the Presbyterian, Reformed Tradition.

John H. Leith, in his *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, says,

...a case can be made that the central theme of [Reformed] theology, which holds it all together, is the conviction that every human being has [at] every moment to do with the *living* God. (1977)

That with everything we do, with everything we say; with every moment, with every day; we do all things taking God into account.

The question is:

- are we focused on that?
- are we attentive to that?
- are we aware of that?

Or, are we only aware that it is *my* arms that are aching and *my* back that is breaking and *my* time being taken? So that from our distracted perspective, the purpose is sucked out of our service and replaced with worry and distraction, and what should be a blessing becomes instead a burden.

The Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church describes

A faithful member [as] bear[ing] witness to God’s love and grace and promis[ing] to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ’s Church. Such involvement includes:...

living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,.... (G-1.0304)

In other words, in everything – every aspect of life – reflecting and affirming the sovereignty of God.

But not simply “do a good job in everything” (which can make us anxious and scattered), but “living responsibly” before God in everything.

You see, the issue is not my agenda or my looking good.

Not what I want, but what God wants.

Not serving myself or my concerns, but serving God and God’s concerns, including “*love your neighbor as yourself.*”

It just so happens that in our story this morning, Martha is the one who is distracted. In another situation, it may very well have been Mary.

In this case, Mary is the one who is focused. In another instance, it may very well have been Martha.

Maybe we can picture it this way: Martha, appropriately focused on the “good part.”

Then all her work in the kitchen would have been a delight. She may very well have been humming to herself in her preparations, every now and then pausing by the kitchen door to hear what Jesus was saying, and then smiling. And there would have been joy in her heart, for she was doing all this for her Lord. And as they sat down to eat, she would have been commended by her Lord for the “good part” she chose in her own way, with her own gifts, the “good part” she chose with unmistakable focus: that of service to her Lord.

As one person notes,

Hospitality is not primarily about the food; more important is the focus.

(James A. Wallace, *Feasting on the Word*, “Homiletical Perspective”)

So we are reminded – very simply, and very profoundly – in the letter to the Colossians:

And whatever you do – whether contemplation or active service, or anything else – whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (3:17 NRSV)

***HYMN** “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” [GtG 700]

1. **I'm gonna live so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, and anytime!
I'm gonna live so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, and anytime!**
2. **I'm gonna work so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, and anytime!
I'm gonna work so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, and anytime!**
3. **I'm gonna pray so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, and anytime!
I'm gonna pray so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, and anytime!**
4. **I'm gonna sing so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, and anytime!
I'm gonna sing so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, and anytime!**

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**In life and in death we belong to God.
Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

**With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: And so we pray to you,...
All: ...Lord, have mercy.

THE LORD'S PRAYER *(Contemporary)*

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**God, we give today in thankfulness, and we give for the continuing growth of
your kingdom in the world. Give us wisdom as a church, so that our**

offerings may be used for the sharing of your word and the service of your people. In the name of the One that gave us everything we are and have. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Be Thou My Vision” GtG 450

1. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art;
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

2. Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true Word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
thou my soul’s shelter, and thou my high tower;
raise thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.

3. Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise;
thou, mine inheritance, now and always;
thou and thou only, first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my treasure thou art.

4. High King of Heaven, my victory won,
may I reach heaven’s joys, O bright heaven’s Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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