



Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 11  
Rev. Jonathan Stepp  
July 21, 2019

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

One night this week my family and I were watching an episode of an old sci-fi show called Stargate Universe. I won't give away all the exciting details of what the show is about, since you might not have seen it yet, but in the episode we were watching the spaceship was in mortal danger with seemingly no escape. The various characters were shown reacted to their impending deaths in various ways – and one group was shown gathering to kneel in prayer. As they recited the Lord's Prayer Lewis joked, "if they were Episcopalian they would only have shown up if it was a Sunday."

Like Martha in today's story from the gospel, we in the Episcopal Church sometimes have the reputation for being more interested in engaging in action and activities than simply sitting quietly in contemplation with Jesus. That's not true of all of us, of course, but it is a bit of a stereotype. Many of us assume that if we make it to a Eucharist once a week – or at least a couple of times a month – we're doing pretty well. After all, there's a lot of work to be done in the world, for ourselves, our families and for the Kingdom of God.

In trying to determine what God might be telling us through this story of Martha and Mary it is interesting to note that Luke positions it immediately after the parable of the Good Samaritan. At first glance the two stories seem to contradict each other, offering two different lessons. The story of the Good Samaritan seems to call us to action while today's story seems to call us to contemplation, prayer, and worship. I believe a deeper look at the two stories shows they are actually communicating the same message.

As we discussed last week, the Parable of the Good Samaritan is about what it looks like to enter into eternal life – it's a description of what it looks like to be in communion with the eternal life of the Trinity. What we realized in viewing the parable in that way is that we are like the man robbed and left for dead: there isn't much we can do for ourselves or on our own, we need God to reach down into the messiness of our lives and help us begin to heal.

Doesn't that also seem to be what Mary has realized in today's story? She has realized, like the robbery victim in the parable, that she needs something she cannot obtain by her own effort. Unlike Martha, she has looked behind the curtain of the busyness of day to day life and caught a glimpse of the hidden reality deeper within our existence. She has looked beyond things, activities, and actions, and she has seen that the hidden mystery at the heart of the universe is the One who loves us more deeply and truly than we love ourselves. And Mary is enraptured and enchanted by this mystery of the Son who has become flesh and blood and lived among us so that his Father is now also our Father and their Holy Spirit is now also the Spirit that guides our lives and transforms our hearts.

Just because many of us Episcopalians tend to prefer action over contemplation we shouldn't assume that the two are disconnected. And if you are the kind of Episcopalian that prefers contemplation over action, you also shouldn't assume a disconnect. Luke's positioning of these two stories right next to each other is a reminder that action and contemplation, work and prayer, activity and worship, are simply two sides of the same coin. Each is an integral part of who God is and who God has made us to be in communion with him.

We gather today for worship, prayer, and eucharist, and as we sit here today at the Lord's feet – like Mary did – we are transformed, healed, and made capable of going and living like Jesus the Good Samaritan. And as we make our way through the world, loving God by loving our neighbor, we will find our selves moved to return again and again to sit at the Lord's feet and learn deeper lessons from him about how to live with him in the life of the Trinity.

And in the end we will learn the lesson that Jesus taught to Martha: we really only have need of one thing: to know the love of the Father, in the Son, through the Holy Spirit. Amen.