

Sermon for 6 Pentecost  
July 20, 2025  
Psalm 52  
Colossians 1:15-28  
Luke 10:38-42

“Give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness cannot ask, through the worthiness of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Just like last week, our collect asks for a lot. Last week it was knowledge, understanding, grace and power; this week it’s everything that we may have left out, for whatever reason, in our prior requests. So what is it that we really need, according to this week’s collect and readings? And more to the point, why is it that last week’s and this week’s readings seem to be polar opposites in what they tell us we need to do? Believe it or not, the answer to those questions is the same. What we need in our lives, no matter how long we’ve been practicing Christians, is more attention to Jesus.

Last week we heard the parable of the Good Samaritan. And I proposed that this was really a story about grace, and how grace is not limited to one place or time, or one set of people, but is available to everyone. One of the things we’re called to do as Christians is to try to see everyone as a recipient of God’s grace, and love them as we love ourselves. Jesus tells the lawyer not to go home and study – he’s already done enough of that – but to do what he knows God calls him to do. And Jesus calls us to do the same when we are baptized into his life and his work. We are supposed to live our lives so that we show grace to everyone we meet, and we are supposed to remember that anyone and everyone can be a means of grace for us.

So at first glance, we might think that last week’s Gospel and this week’s Gospel have nothing to do with each other. After a lesson last week in which the whole message is “go and do,” we have a lesson in which doing seems to be the wrong thing. This is the story of Mary and Martha: one who works and one who sits and listens. Which means, at least according to some theologians, that “doing” should take second place to “being.” Or perhaps, in direct contrast to the Good Samaritan parable, doing should take second place to passivity, to listening, to study. But I’m sure that’s not what Jesus has in mind when he tells Martha that Mary has chosen the better part. Because what Jesus is warning Martha against is not doing, but being distracted by doing. And there’s a big difference.

Both Mary and Martha are acting according to their gifts. Martha’s gift is hospitality, making Jesus welcome, making sure that everything is in place, making

sure that Jesus and the disciples have food and drink and whatever else is necessary after their travels. That's an important gift, and it's not one to be disparaged lightly. Mary's gift is to realize that what she needs at the moment is to be in Jesus' presence, to keep Jesus in her heart and mind, even if that means she's not doing what society expected of her... which is staying out of the men's way and helping Martha in the kitchen. The reason that Mary has "chosen the better part" is not that she's being passive, or "just being" - it's that she's keeping Jesus in focus. Jesus is in her whole heart and mind and soul, and so he is in the forefront of what she's doing. Martha may be intending to do the same, but obviously it's not working. She's distracted and frantic, trying to do it all herself without stepping back and seeing if there might be another way to accomplish what needs to be done. And she's so upset and frantic that she doesn't even have the sisterly courtesy to talk with Mary quietly, but rather reprimands her in front of Jesus, hoping that Jesus will take her, Martha's, part. In her rush to make sure that everything is done correctly, Martha is, in fact, loving neither her neighbors Mary and Jesus, nor really loving herself. And that is what Jesus rebukes her for.

This gospel is not about a conflict between being and doing. Instead, it's meant to help us remember several things that all too often get lost in the shuffle of busy lives, even lives that are honestly trying to live into God's call to us. First of all, we need to have the courage of our convictions, and do what we feel honestly called to do, even if that's not precisely what society or our neighbors would expect of us. Secondly, we need to remember that someone else's call is not necessarily our own, and so we need to not be too quick to reprimand someone if they're doing something different than we are. And third, we need to remember that sometimes "doing" involves sitting down in the presence of Jesus and recharging our batteries before we pick up the next task. And that can be really hard in a world which thinks that doing and overdoing and full calendars are a sign of success.

Instead of seeing this Gospel as a conflict between different gifts, what if we choose to see this as a request to use our gifts rightly, not with pride in our accomplishment, but with joy that we each have a specific way of loving and serving God and our neighbor? What if the idea is not about choosing between Mary and Martha, and arguing who's worthier or more useful to the kingdom, but choosing to focus on Jesus and what he asks of us? The questions we need to keep in mind as we go about our tasks are "What am I doing and why am I doing this? Is my ego on the line here – as it seemed to be with Martha – or am I doing this because I'm focused on God and God's call?"

This is part of what's going on in the psalm this morning. At first glance, it seems like a bit of a stretch to connect this psalm and the Gospel. But what we have here

is a contrast between “the tyrant who trusted in wealth” and lived a wicked life, and the psalmist, who trusts in God’s mercy and relies on God to keep him “green and fruitful.” The tyrant trusts in the world; the psalmist trusts in God’s presence in his life. It’s only by living into God’s promises, and trusting in God’s mercy, that our works and our faith stay green and fruitful. And this is an issue that confronts both the Marthas and the Marys in life. Without God’s help, those who are like Mary can fall into daydreaming, unconnected to the world and the world’s needs. Without God’s help, the Marthas of the world can be so focused on work that they burn out, or perhaps worse, can come to see what they do as an end in itself, rather than seeing their works as a way of serving Christ through serving others. Both ways of life at their root are good and necessary... and both ways of life have within them the seeds that can pull them off track, if we focus more on ourselves than on God.

And Colossians pretty much brings home the point one more time. Since we are reconciled to God through Jesus, we don’t need to worry so much about what we do, but rather need to keep steadfast in our faith. Our glory is not what we do for ourselves, for our own pride and ego and sense of accomplishment. Rather, it’s in knowing that we are part of the body of Christ, people who have received God’s grace. And our mission is to use our God-given gifts to pass on that grace to others, so that they can share in the kingdom too. Martha’s problem is that she’s not being gracious, grace-filled, in her hospitality. Jesus doesn’t devalue what she’s doing; he simply suggests that now is not the time to be doing it, and he invites her to listen to him for a while and then make, perhaps, a different choice.

The struggle between word and deed, between listening and action, will always be with us. Listening for God’s call helps us to keep the balance, helps us to know when it’s time to be Martha or Mary – because we spend our lives being a little of both. We are called to serve the world and help bring about a world of grace and mercy and love and peace. But we can’t do that if we don’t also take the time to relax and recharge, to pause and listen for God to affirm or gently correct the direction we’re going.

We are people and a community called by God to focus on Christ and Christ’s work in the world. We are called each day to listen to what God is saying, and to try to direct our lives by God’s compass, not ours. If we are “worried and distracted by many things,” then we, both as individuals and as a community, run the risk of paying more attention to things and events than to the reasons for the things and events. When we focus on “how we’re doing” rather than on serving God and our neighbor, then pride has the opportunity to take over, and grace, love and joy often go flying out the window. Luckily, God always is willing to redirect us if we are

willing to listen. God will, in the words of our morning collect, “have compassion on our weakness” and give us what we need to keep going and keep focused on Jesus.

So rather than worrying over “who has chosen the better part” this morning, let’s focus on what we’re really supposed to be doing. Love God. Love ourselves. Love our neighbor. Pay attention to the graces in our lives, and look for those graces in others, so that it becomes easier to love them. Ask God each day what God would have us do. And then take our gifts and use them as we are called to do, and rejoice that we are bringing heaven on earth one step closer to completion. Then we will know that we are, in fact, doing what God wants us to do. And Jesus will rejoice and say to all of us that we have chosen the better part.

Amen.