

Barre Congregational Church

May 10, 2020: A Pastoral message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Fifth Sunday of Easter~

“ When Jesus engages with women...”

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:38-42

At the Home of Martha and Mary

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.

⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

⁴¹ “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things,

⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one.^[a] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

I. Introduction:

I don’t know about you, but when I read this passage, I see a little bit of myself in Martha, who spent quite a bit of time and energy cleaning house and making all kinds of preparations for Jesus’ visit. A dear friend of mine once commented how she felt like a huiskind/a house child at our home. She was not expecting a place that was perfectly clean but enjoyed the company and the unconditional love she received. It feels good though, to get things ready and open one’s home to friends and family and share the comfort of a home.

II. A special visit by Jesus to the home of Martha and Mary

At first glance, this visit of Jesus to the home of Martha and Mary gives me such a cozy and comfortable feeling. We see Him entering and settling in with Mary at His feet listening to Him, and Martha getting things ready for their guest. Earlier in Luke we read how Jesus instructed His disciples how to behave when they were guests at people’s homes. They were to greet the inhabitants with peace and eat and drink whatever was offered to them. This was

pretty much the practice during the time of Jesus and His disciples as they were traveling and visiting with people.

So, Jesus was going to enjoy a great meal, and have some good conversations with them, and maybe have some rest, since He and His disciples had been travelling quite a bit. It is obvious that he was quite comfortable visiting these two women, even though it was not customary for women and men to intermingle during the ancient times. Martha and Mary, however, were the sisters of Lazarus whom Jesus resurrected, so they knew Him well enough to invite Him in as their friend. From our knowledge of Jesus and His interaction with women, it was clear that He made women feel at home in His presence. They were traveling with Him like the men in the crowds; and when they needed healing, He responded to their needs. He engaged with them, He knew their circumstances, and never judged them. Jesus transformed the old order and ushered in a new way of being, where men and women would receive the same treatment, the same love, and He made His teachings of the Good news available to them all. He made the whole family feel loved and embraced by His openness.

III. Jesus finds Himself in the middle of a dispute!

In our passage both sisters are attentive to Jesus's presence in their own way... Martha offering Him hospitality and Mary sitting at his feet, listening to Him.

This cozy setting quickly develops into a bit of a tense situation when Martha expresses to Jesus her dissatisfaction about Mary not helping out. She must have been frantic and tired from all the hard work, and understandably so. They have a guest, after all, and this guest is Jesus Christ. Mary on the other hand, is so captivated by His presence, listening attentively to His message and His travels. She has a completely different focus and interest.

Jesus finds himself in the middle of a potential dispute. Let us see how He handles it. First, He does not tell Mary to go and help. He also does not tell Martha to stop the preparations, however He strikes a fine balance between the two actions of these women. While He acknowledges Martha's need to treat Him the best way she could, He cautions her about all her worries and upset about the many things that needed to get done. He tells her, "Only one thing is needed, Martha, and Mary is getting that from Me right now." Jesus was the better portion than the food that was offered. While Martha prepared the food that would be eaten

and be gone, Mary chose to listen to the spiritual food that could not be taken away from her. He wants Martha to see the importance of Mary's action, which is to sit and listen to the message of the Gospel. Historically, when someone was sitting at the feet of the teacher, it was considered an important act of studying and becoming like a disciple of that teacher. We read elsewhere about Paul himself sitting at the feet of Gamaliel, listening, and studying.

Jesus wants Martha to participate in the real purpose of His visit—that is, to hear the Good news he wanted to share with them. He did not just visit as an earthly friend, instead, He was there to teach them about the things that would nourish them spiritually.

Mary is the quiet character in this story. Her mind, heart and soul had been touched by what He shared with her. She learned about the love of God for every human being. She learned about the compassion we see in the parable of the Good Samaritan just before this passage. She learned about prayer. She is in the process of being transformed spiritually and becoming a follower and student of Christ.

The story gives us the impression that these two sisters are in opposition to each other. The truth is, that Martha's focus on being a good hostess was not a bad thing. It does not mean that Mary was the better person either. It just means that when Christ showed up, Martha struggled to recognize Why He was there. He did not need all that stuff she was preparing. He came with a message for them as sisters. He needed them both to have a listening ear for what He had to say.

IV. Conclusion

This message on this Mothers' Day is for all the mothers and women out there, and our men can listen too! Whether we are cooking or cleaning house, do work outside, or do all the good things for the church, this message brings home the importance of a Jesus visit. A Jesus visit at our homes does not require a perfect place. A Jesus visit says, "I am here! I need your attention for a while. Stop what you are doing and get to know Me and what I am about. There is a lot to learn and if you ask the question, I will be there to teach you. All I need, is a quiet moment with you, if you have the time to listen". This passage also shows us how different we are in the presence of our Lord! We have different personalities, and we respond to Him in

different ways. It is a message, however, that breaks through those differences, and teaches us how Christ is accepting of all of us and wants to teach us the deeper things He has to offer.

We find ourselves at our homes, not able to invite our friends and loved ones in ways we are used to, because of the pandemic. Well, this may be a good time to accept that offer from our Lord Jesus Christ, to find some quiet moments, and maybe read some of the biblical stories we have not read before, or spend a little more time in prayer. In doing that we might just discover a specific message that Jesus has for each one of us. We may just find the strength and hope we need for the days ahead.

Blessings to all of you, and happy Mother's Day! Amen