

**“Heart, Mind and Soul”**  
**A Sermon by Rev. Victoria ByRoade**  
**Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Sunday, July 18, 2010**  
**Scripture: Luke 10:38-42**

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:** *Lord Jesus, as we gather to hear your message to us this morning, give us the grace to be still, quiet and attentive, and then grant us the grace to go forth renewed and recommitted to follow you in the world, doing your will and acting in your name. Amen.*

As I have shared with you before, one of the ways in which I prepare to write my weekly sermon is to read, not only commentaries on the text, but also sermons others have written. I just loved the way in which Brett Younger started his meditation on the story about Mary and Martha. He began with the following words, “I should not admit this, but it is easier to be a man. Your last name stays put. Wedding plans take care of themselves. Mechanics tell you the truth. You never have to drive to another gas station restroom because this one is ‘just too icky’. Three pairs of shoes is more than enough. The same hairstyle lasts for years. You never have to ask for directions – not even when you’re lost. You get extra credit for the slightest act of thoughtfulness. It is harder to be a woman. It would be especially hard, I would think, to have been a woman in charge of a dinner party when Jesus was coming.

Many scholars feel that the story of Mary and Martha is so closely tied to the story of the good Samaritan that the two ought never be separated. Yet the lectionary does separate them, and really I think that is an okay thing. It allows us to focus on some of the unique aspects of each story. At the same time, it is helpful to keep this latter story in the context of its predecessor.

Both stories are unique to Luke and, as

is Luke’s pattern, they do indeed complement each other. In last week’s story, Jesus emphasizes without question that the world is our neighborhood, and that all people are our neighbors – those in need and even those whom we do not like. This week’s story, directly on the heels of that story, points out that listening to Jesus’ word as a disciple is also vital. Last week we were reminded that sometimes we have to go and do. This week reminds us that sometimes we have to stop and be quiet.

In a world where too many of us get tied to email, cell phones, texting, and the like, this is a good message to hear. There are times when we need to stop: to spend time with friends and family, but even more – to sit and meditate, to pray, to spend time in the presence of God.

Friends, God has difficulty entering a mind that is caught up in the business of the day, whoever we are and whatever we do. Taking a break opens us up to his presence and gives us the opportunity for learning and growth. This is what Mary chooses, and what we are invited to choose as well.

We are called to listen to Jesus. Putting off, making excuses, finding other things to do is never an excuse. We can even find that, as we listen, we are freed up to do more. “There is need of only one thing,” Jesus tells us. If we will open ourselves to the word of God and the call to discipleship, we find the rest of things fall into place. Do you remember the words of that hymn we sing pretty often “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Allelu, Alleluia.” It’s true.

During the past few Sundays we have focused on the various demands of discipleship, which happen also, my friends, to be the demands of being a member of a church. And I have stressed over and over that the only real thing required is that you believe and accept that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior. I have also

said more than once, too, though, that Jesus loves us just the way we are, but loves us too much to allow us to stay that way. And that once we have made a commitment to him – once we have become a part of a family of faith, that there would be things we would want to change in our lives. The first Sunday of this series on Membership, I mentioned some words from the Book of Order for our denomination. This morning, I would like to share with you something else that book says:

“A faithful member (read this, too, as a faithful disciple) accepts Christ’s call to be involved responsibly in the ministry of his Church. Such involvement includes

- a. proclaiming the good news,
- b. taking part in the common life and worship of a particular church,
- c. praying and studying Scripture and the faith of the Christian Church,
- d. supporting the work of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,
- e. participating in the governing responsibilities of the church,
- f. demonstrating a new quality of life within and through service to others
- g. responding to God’s activity in the world through service to others,
- h. living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,
- i. working in the world for peace, justice, freedom and human fulfillment.

As you can see, there are many different ways by which we can be respond to Christ’s call on our lives and many ways in which we can be involved in his ministry.

What I see in the story we heard this morning from Luke’s gospel about Jesus in the home of Mary and Martha is that Jesus blesses

our involvement in ministry in whatever ways we respond. The Christian life involves times of frenetic activity. But the Christian life also involves times of quiet meditation. In fact, I think many of you could testify that the harder you work at being a Christian, the tougher the assignments you take on, the more desperately you need times of quiet and reflection.

You see, I think we do this story of Jesus at the home of Mary and Martha a disservice if we interpret it in such a way that we contrast one of the sisters with the other. If you ask me, the challenge here is not to decide which of the sisters got discipleship right. The message here might not be that Martha is doing something wrong and Mary is doing something right. The struggle here is not that Martha is a busy bee who can't stay still long enough to enjoy Jesus and that Mary is the adoring, perfect disciple who sits quietly at Jesus' feet, hanging on his every word.

When Jesus says that Mary has "chosen the better part," I think it's a mistake to stress that word "better." Probably we ought to stress the word "part". In the New Testament Greek, this little phrase is perhaps better translated that Mary is playing a "good part." It is not that Martha's part is a bad part. Martha is just playing her part, busy doing good things, getting ready to show Jesus warm hospitality. And her part is good. And Mary, reflecting upon the significance of what Jesus is saying, listening to his every word, is also playing her part. It is a role which is different from that of Martha, but it is a good role for someone to play. It is a necessary part of the whole picture of discipleship.

Following Jesus is a demanding task. Sometimes it takes energy, resourcefulness, and lots of bold, hard work. And sometimes it means simply being with him, - listening to him, enjoying him, and hanging on to his every word.

That evening when Jesus arrived at the

home of Mary and Martha, he did not talk to one sister and ignore the other. He loved and blessed them both by his presence with them both. Teaching both of the sisters, he blessed them both as disciples. And so he blesses you.

To serve alone is not good. It is stressful and every community needs a cooperation of forces so that all of the service gets both equally shared and received. At this point, we must see Martha and Mary as complementary ministries to the church and not as divisive and separate ones. Cooperation, thus, is the key to get communities working, neither having someone relying on somebody else's work, nor blaming those who are not doing what they were supposed to do.

Had Mary helped, Martha would have not been anxious. Had Martha understood the other part of their ministry, Mary could have engaged Jesus without being reprimanded. Thus, this text is about communal life, about life together, shared, equally. Also, this text shows how difficult and challenging this life together is, and how it presents to us a different way of living with one another.

Jesus loved and appreciate both Mary and Martha and he loves and appreciates each and everyone of us. And an important part of being his disciples is to love him and each other with heart, mind and soul.

May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

*Thanks to Brett Younger for his sermon, "A Place at the Table", Donald Schmidt for his sermon, "Don't Just Do Something, Stand There!", Hymn #333 in the Presbyterian Hymnal, "Seek Ye First", Karen Lafferty, The Book of Order for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) G-5.0102, William Willimon for his comments on this text and for his sermon, "Play Your Part for Jesus", and Claudio Carvalhaes for comments on this text.*

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