

Sermon preached by Rev'd Carole Barnet - 21st July

Luke 10:38-42 (Mary and Martha)

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Yesterday marked the 50th anniversary of the first men to walk on the moon and I've been fascinated to watch once again those grainy pictures beamed down to earth from that time. I have often pondered how those astronauts must have felt – excited, even exhilarated, terrified, or just completely absorbed by the task that lay ahead of them? Surely, when you have just undergone a dangerous journey sitting atop millions of tonnes of fuel, then landed on, and are about to walk on a strange new world in an unknown environment, you'd be checking computer systems, whether your space suit would function properly, ensuring you didn't close the space craft hatch behind you so that you couldn't get back in!? So, the thing that has amazed me most of all this week, is what Buzz Aldrin (the second man to walk on the moon) actually said and did before he left the Lunar Module (the LM, named The Eagle).

'Houston, this is Eagle. This is LM Pilot speaking. I would like to request a few moments silence. I would like to invite each person listening in, wherever and whomsoever he may be, to contemplate for a moment the events of the past few hours and to give thanks in his own individual way'.

Aldrin was inviting over half a billion people across the world into communion with him. And, for him, this meant *taking* Holy Communion. As the world fell silent, Aldrin opened two plastic packages containing bread and wine and poured the wine into the chalice his Parish had given him. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine curled slowly and gracefully up the cup. How fascinating to think that the very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the first food eaten there, were consecrated elements.

For me, today's Gospel reading is equally fascinating. On the surface, the point of the story is clear: Martha is a 'do-er'; and Mary is a 'pray-er'. But it is far more than that.

This passage follows immediately after the parable of the Good Samaritan which we heard last week, and once again, the depiction of the characters challenges social norms:

- Jesus visits the women in their home, and Martha welcomes him into "*her* house". There is no mention of Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, nor of any male disciples. There is no reference to a man as the head of this household—Martha is clearly in charge.
- Mary sits at Jesus' feet to receive his teaching, the posture of a disciple, a man's place, a place of honour.
- Martha is busying herself with hospitality but it goes beyond that as she shows resentment, even rebuking Jesus in a far from respectful tone - "Tell her to help me."

While Luke characterised service positively in the parable of the Good Samaritan, service can also be a distracter, especially if it is done begrudgingly. Martha has her own agenda, and demands that Jesus aligns himself and Mary to that agenda. But Jesus tells Martha that she is "distracted by many things," and then uses puzzling phrases; "There is need of only one thing." "Mary has chosen the better part".

Martha and Mary need Jesus, and Martha's busyness distances her from him. Jesus needs Martha and Mary, too. Jesus knows what awaits him in Jerusalem, and he needs good

friends now more than good food. Being a disciple involves '**being**' *with* God. There is plenty of time for action. First, the disciple must learn from the master.

The story is primarily about discipleship focused on listening to God instead of allowing ourselves to be distracted by many concerns. It *is* also about relationships – about welcome, hospitality, and about inclusivity – but inclusivity *includes* God. If we don't spend time praying and listening to Him, we cut Him out of our lives. The parable of the Good Samaritan includes the two great commandments – first, to love God with all our being and, then, to love our neighbour as ourselves. This parable is a call for us to come into the presence of God, *before* we go about our action, together with our neighbours. Only then, can we be truly assured that our busyness will further God's kingdom.

This has implications for all of us. We, too, are busy about many things. We, too, can be troubled and distracted. We, too, need to choose the better part—to sit at the master's feet—to steep ourselves in prayer. I guess there is something of the Mary and the Martha inside each one of us: the active, busy, distracted as well as the reflective and contemplative. But modern life so stresses active virtues that we are in danger of forgetting the need for spiritual replenishment, for practicing the presence of God, for just being with Him in quietness and stillness, in order to renew our energy and our spirit. Opportunities to do just that are offered right here in Church. Come along to Breathing Space on the second Wednesday of each month at 8:00pm and/or join us for Holy Hour on the last Saturday of each month at 11:00am.

The story of Mary and Martha does not teach us that it is better to sit than to do. It teaches us to discern—to seek the better thing, whatever situation we might find ourselves in. Let us again remember the relationship of *this* story (which shows the value of *listening* to Jesus) to the parable of the Good Samaritan (which shows the value of *taking action*). Jesus teaches that both listening *and* acting are appropriate behaviours for his disciples but it is about setting priorities carefully.

A man just about to step on the moon recognised the need to keep God at the very centre of all he was about to do. He stopped and he prayed *before* going about his busyness. He asked the whole world to stop with him and it seemed like the whole world prayed in communion with him. What a powerful image. Then he feasted on the body and blood of Jesus.

God invites us all 'to **be**' as well as 'to do' both individually and together as a community. And, this is what we do each time we celebrate the Eucharist. We pray; we enter more deeply into God's presence; we stand side by side in communion with Him and with each other. We receive bread and wine and God gives us His blessing. *Then* we are sent out, together, to do God's work.

In the words of our own Parish prayer (printed at the very beginning of your service booklets), God calls us "to be faithful in prayer *and* loving service". To all of us, God is speaking and He invites each and every one of us to listen in, wherever and whomsoever we may be. So, be still; find some silence at least once every day. Listen to God. Be in communion with each other and with the world. But, start by being in communion with God.

Amen.