

Distractions, Distractions, Distractions

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One of the things I like about this passage from Luke; and this may just be the pre-teen in me talking, is the potential to use it as an excuse to not do my chores. If I'd known my scripture better at that early age, I might have gone up to my mother and said, "Mom, I'm not suppose to be cleaning my bedroom or doing the dishes right now. I'm supposed to be at Jesus' feet. The Bible says so. So stop telling me to do those things." Of course, that wouldn't have worked with my mother, because she's a preacher's kid herself. I'm sure she might have tried something similar a time or two with Granddad.

More to the point though, it's interesting because there's a duality in this scripture. There's one side to it saying, "We have to be about the things of God. We must be working. We must be bringing the kingdom. We must be loving, and we must be showing hospitality. We must be doing all these things in the name of Christ. Then this scripture comes along where Jesus seems to be teaching the opposite. We must slow down and be quiet at Jesus' feet.

It's a little confusing. It doesn't seem to all fit together all the time. I mean, what was the scripture a few weeks ago? It was Jesus calling on 70-some witnesses to go out and to spread the word. Well, that seems like a lot of work, to gather up 70 people and get them ready and hyped up to send them out to the towns. You have to teach them what to say. In this case it was "peace be with you." You have to train them to recognize the people that are open and accepting of the peace you offer. Then you have to train them how to evangelize effectively. How do we talk about Jesus? How do we share the good news of, "the kingdom of God is near"?

Then there's Paul who's going out and doing all this travelling and evangelizing. He's writing letter after letter to keep the newly formed churches of God focused on Jesus and the life he calls us to. That's a lot of work!

We have the Church that comes into existence to spread the hope and the love of Jesus Christ. That doesn't happen just by sitting. You all know that. Just one example, Judee has been working day in and day out around the church and parsonage grounds, weeding and landscaping, to make our church look warm and inviting to those who might venture to visit us on Sundays. That's hard work.

Yet now, today, we have a scripture that says the opposite of that. The scripture is Martha complaining to Jesus about Mary. "Jesus, Lord, how is it ok with you that I'm doing all the work, I'm doing all the hospitality, I'm cooking all the food, I'm washing the dishes, I'm making sure the house is clean, I'm making sure you're comfortable; I've done all of these things. That's not easy in my time, 'cause we don't have washing machines and dishwashers like they do in the future. I don't have a bread machine or a gas oven. I've gotta stoke the fire and keep it hot enough myself. How is it ok with you that I'm doing all the work and following the law and doing the hospitality thing, and Mary is just sitting at your feet... on her duff... doing nothin'?"

Have you ever felt like that? I'm guessing you have a time or two. Perhaps a family member, a friend, or someone else you may know, whom you dearly love, just isn't pulling their weight. Perhaps you know a person who is great to have around and awesome to hang out with, but you know if you ask them to help you move they're not going to be any good at it. They're sitting there while you're moving things around, picking up the heavy stuff, working up a sweat. You're left wondering, 'why did I invite this person to help me?' What good is it to have someone who won't help in the work when there's so much to do?

I'm not gonna lie. Being the church involves a lot of work. We don't want to work with folks who aren't going to pull their weight.

But in this case, where scripture takes us is different. The difference is this. The work that Jesus calls us to do for the kingdom is not the same as the work we do to distract ourselves. The work we do for the kingdom is not the same as the work we might think is so important.

Let me ask you this. Have you ever gotten so caught up in the details of the work you needed to do, or a task you volunteered to take on, you completely forgot the reason you were doing it to begin with? When our work gets so involved, and so overloaded, we forget the passion that brought us into that work to begin with, that's the line Jesus is saying don't cross.

Martha and Mary were doing what was right by their culture. The ancient hospitality code says to invite the traveler into your home. Show them hospitality. Jesus is travelling and they invited Jesus into their home. The second part of why they did it is, this is Jesus! This is a man who has been travelling around declaring the message of the kingdom of God come near. So, of course, yes! Let's have him in our home! Invite Jesus in. Make him comfortable. Let him stay and we can learn from him of this kingdom of God.

That was the passion that moved Martha and Mary to invite Jesus into their home to begin with. This is Jesus, whom we have heard has changed lives, healed the sick, and has even brought back people from the dead. He's performed signs and wonders. He's taught love so radically it's changing the way we understand God, and the way we understand each other. So, yes, let's bring him into our home.

It starts with that passion. Do you remember that passion? Whether you grew up in the church or whether you were reborn in Christ later in life, do you remember that passion? 'This is Jesus Christ, the source of the good news, God in flesh, who has come into my life and is changing my heart. I am reborn. I am a new creation through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. I am a vessel that God can live in and I can live in God. Together we can change the world, and transform our communities, and be beacons of light and love and hope.'

Do you remember that passion when you first heard the message of Jesus Christ? Perhaps you felt your heart strangely warmed and knew there could be more to life with God. So you opened yourself to the transformation that comes with being a new born child of God. That's what Mary is feeling. It's what she is hoping for and being swaddled in at the feet of Jesus.

And Martha... Well, while Martha had that passion when they first invited Jesus in; she's become distracted. Yes, keeping the house in order is important. Yes, hospitality is important, Yes,

keeping guests feeling comfortable and welcomed is important. But not to the point we are distracted from our passions. And definitely not to the point we become distracted from Jesus.

There's a special gift we have in Jesus; a truly special gift. It's the way we understand God. More specifically, it's the way we're in relationship with God. The way God relates to us is different from the way pagan cultures related to their deities.

In middle eastern cultures at that time, there were a number of different ways of understanding and relating to the divine. The way you accessed the divine was you did things to get the divine's attention. Not so much in the Hebrew cultures, but in the cultures around Israel and Judah, worship and ritual were how you got the gods' attention so they would pay attention to you. Perform this ceremony, or make this sacrifice, or flatter the gods with such and such an offering and they might consider you worthy of their attention. Go to the temple, spend some time with the temple prostitute, get the gods hot and bothered so they'll mate. That'll cause the ground to be fertile and the harvest will be plentiful.

It was the same thing in Roman culture. The gods of Rome didn't necessarily pay much attention to the people on earth. Humans were more of a nuisance or an annoyance. They were up there doing their own thing and every so often they would take notice and mess around in human lives. If you wanted their attention, you had to do something worthy of their attention. You had to work at being noticed.

What does our God do? Our God's attention is on us from the beginning. Our God constantly wants to be involved in our lives. Our God is always looking for our love even as God loves us. Our God comes down and sits with us, teaches us, loves us. Our God does not expect us to do all the work, but rather calls us to have a part in the work. Our God lives within us.

That's part of the message in the passage from Colossians this morning; God is not a separate God. There is not the Old Testament God and the New Testament God. God is the same now as God was in the beginning, and God is doing a new thing in Jesus Christ. It's this same Jesus Christ who has been given authority over everything. He was there at the beginning when the world was created, completely involved in the work of creation with God and as God. Jesus is the first born of the dead; resurrected as we will all be resurrected when the final days come. Jesus Christ is all we need and is the one truth we need in our lives. He must be the focus of our lives, God in flesh come down to earth so we would know salvation. Part of the joy we have in Jesus Christ is he has chosen to indwell; to live within us, God in our hearts.

What does that mean? It means there's no need for a temple. It means we are God's temples. Our hearts are the throne of God. We are a people in whom the Spirit lives, filled with the Holy Spirit. That is a privilege and an act of love. It's God saying, 'I am with you all the time, in all the places you travel, everywhere you are in need of me. I am in you and you are in me. Walk with me and together we can transform the world.' It is such a joy to have that gift, to be able to come and sit at the feet of Jesus.

Now there is a lot of work that does need to get done. I'm not gonna stand here and say, like the pre-teen version of myself, "Hey Mom, I don't have to do the dishes. Jesus wants me to sit at

his feet.” I am gonna say, in order to do the work, we first must have the passion within ourselves that leads us to such radical love and hospitality as Jesus calls us to.

Yet, we must find those quiet moments, because Jesus wants to share life with us. Remember that. In all our daily tasks. In all our comings and goings, in everything we do and in everything we are, Jesus wants to be with us.

Can you imagine that? Think about it. The Jesus who has authority over all creation, who was there at the beginning; for in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. This Jesus, who, even though he was so great in authority, took on flesh and made himself lower than all in order for us to have salvation and abundant life. This very same Jesus wants to share life with us and spend time with us. Jesus, who changes lives in powerful ways filled with God’s love, makes time for us.

As we get to the work of the church; the work of transforming the world in the name of God, we need to first come to Jesus. We need to first have those moments of silence in the quiet places where Jesus calls us to just sit and be. We need to first listen for that voice of God; however God’s voice comes to us. We need to allow God to have that time, ‘cause here’s the thing. God creates time for us. The God of all creation who put everything into motion, the first mover who said, ‘I’m going to create the universe and a people to love so deeply I will die for them,’ makes time for us. How much more should we make time for God?

An interesting thing... people are more productive when they get more rest. People are more productive when they have that time to get away and recharge. People who are busy, are just busy. People who are productive have likely given themselves time to prepare, they work from a place of passion, they have a healthy rejuvenation routine like meditation and exercise. If we have these three disciplines with God, what more can we do in God’s name?

Think of it. If you recharge with God every morning, if you have your getaways and your sabbaths and rest with God, how much better do we come out of it? As we go forward, as we live this life, as we hope in Christ, as we work to transform the world, let us first go to God. Let us not be a Martha, distracting and busying ourselves to the point we become drained and empty in our spirit, hardly useful for anything. Let us rest and take time with our God, meeting Jesus and sitting at his feet, feeling his presence, hearing his words, knowing his peace. Recharge, rejuvenate, and be made new again and again and again.

Our God wants to spend time with us. Let us be sure, as a covenant people, to make time for our God.

In Jesus’ holy and everlasting name. Amen.