

*Both/And*  
*Luke 10:38-42*

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I have to confess that I have been having an interior argument with our Gospel reading for the entire week. There are two main characters in our scripture – Martha and Mary. Martha is the doer – she is the one who invited Jesus into her house when he arrived in her village and she is the one who is running around trying to provide the hospitality and meal for Jesus once he’s seated at the table. She is also the one who complains to Jesus that Mary isn’t helping with the work. After all, it is only fair that Mary help because that was the job for women in the first century – to cook and provide for those who gathered in their home. Mary, however, is not a doer – she is a listener and she has taken a seat at Jesus’ feet to listen to his teaching and wisdom. When Martha complains about Mary, Jesus states: “Martha, Martha, you are worried about many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her.”

My argument with this story is that I am a doer – I like to get things done; I like to get things done and do a good job for the task that needs to get done. I like to have things ordered and in place. In my opinion, schedules are schedules and life works best if we keep them. At the same time, however, I am a listener. I begin each day with a half hour of contemplation and centering. I love listening to scripture and opening my heart to what it might mean. I love to listen to others and to immerse myself in the natural world and listen to it. If I pay attention, I notice when the hummingbirds show up and that the first monarch butterflies are now in my garden.

This week, however, the doer side of me was in charge. Bob and I ended up going to North Carolina for a funeral which meant the schedule for the week was turned upside down. I do not like to fly so I am not the most relaxed when I am on an airplane. While sitting on the plane coming home from the funeral I realized I was anxious so I began to pray and ask The Holy to help me let go of my anxiety. And, by the way, please wrap healing light around the grieving family, my daughter who was going to have surgery the next day, all the people and places who were dealing with the horrible terrorist attacks, this church and to be with me as I prepared this sermon. My prayer was a list of requests and I found myself talking at God rather than listening to God. What I heard was: “Hush. Shhh. Be still. Hush.” My inner doer was not interested in hushing. She wanted to keep telling God what God should do. God kept telling me to hush, hush, hush.

The tension between the doer and the listener is the subject of our scripture today. In some way, most of us carry around both an inner Martha and an inner Mary. It is interesting to note that Jesus tells Martha that Mary, the listener, knows the better way. It is also interesting to note that the story that comes before this story in the Gospel of Luke is the story of the Good Samaritan. That is a story about doing and was last week’s lectionary reading. Our story is a story about listening. Luke clearly wants to point out that Jesus encouraged both doing and listening. However, Jesus taught that our doing needed to evolve from our listening. When we’re distracted from God’s word by all the activity and details of our lives, we are called to listen.

A few years ago, Joyce Rupp, a Roman Catholic nun, walked the full 500 miles of the Christian pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain in honor of her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. As some of you know, I will be leading a pilgrimage this September to Spain to walk the final 108 Kilometers of the ancient path known as “The Camino.” I am reading about the pilgrimage in order to prepare for

the trip. In the book, Rupp tells the story of learning to walk in a relaxed manner. In the first days of her pilgrimage she discovered that she was in a rush. It made her anxious that the young people on the trail were rushing past her, covering more miles than her each day and getting to the hostel before her. She worried that if she didn't hurry up there wouldn't be a bed for her to sleep in. She worried that her 60-year-old body wouldn't hold up for the full 500 miles because she was rushing. She worried that others would have a better experience of the pilgrimage than she would because they were walking longer days and faster miles. She had come on the pilgrimage to leave behind the craziness of her "to do" list only to discover that she was turning the pilgrimage into a different kind of "to do" list. She had to learn how to walk in a relaxed manner. That meant slowing down her pace as well as the inner story she has telling herself. It meant letting go of her agenda and opening her heart to listening for God's wisdom along the way. Once she began to walk slowly and listen for God both inside her heart and in the outer world, she began to understand the true meaning of her pilgrimage.

The message in our Gospel reading is not that we should give up our "to do" list completely. As Christians, we are called to serve. Rather, the message is that we are to listen at the feet of Jesus so that our "to do" list is informed by God's wisdom – not just our own desires. When we listen for the wisdom of the Holy, our listening informs us on how to be – our listening makes our action sacred because we bring God along with us in our doing.

As I listened on the airplane to the Wisdom that was telling me to "hush," I began to quiet down and let go of the laundry list of prayer concerns that were making me anxious. What I heard was the invitation to remember that life is what it is – there is joy and there is sorrow; there is death and there is resurrection; there is illness and there is health. Through all of our living, God is with us. Our task is to let go of our inner, preconceived understanding of how life should be, our desire to fix everything, and let ourselves live into the bigger story God invites us to live – the story of loving our neighbor and loving our God.

On Friday night, Bob and I drove out to Simsbury with a picnic dinner to listen to the Hartford Symphony. The symphony was opening its concert with a favorite piece of ours: Aaron Copeland's "Appalachian Spring." I had forgotten that toward the end of the piece Copeland uses the tune "It's a Gift to be Simple" as a fugue. If I remember correctly, the tune starts with the piano and moves to the violins, then the violas and then the cellos before the bass comes in with a deep, glorious rendition of the theme. As I sat on the grass watching the moon become more and more distinct as the sun set and the sky grew darker, I think I heard Jesus whisper in much the same way that he must have spoken to Martha: "Shhhh. Hush. Don't complicate things. It's a gift to be simple – it's a gift to be free – it's a gift to rest in Holy Love and learn to move in a relaxed manner.

May God be with us on the journey. Amen.

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