

The Listening-Love-Link

[Text - Luke 10:38-42]

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One thing you can say about Jesus, is that he certainly keeps us on our toes! Last Sunday, we read from the Tenth Chapter of *Luke* Jesus' magnificent parable about helping and serving our neighbors in need. The message was loud and clear: "Jump-in and get involved with attending to the needs of others!" Immediately following that Good Samaritan story, however, comes this *other* story, about Mary and Martha. Martha appears to be doing exactly what Jesus desires - diligently serving and caring for the physical needs of those around her. Mary, on the other hand, is simply sitting and listening to this remarkable Rabbi - something that women really weren't supposed to do back in those days. Yet, when Martha asks Jesus to "tell my sister to help me," he reprimands her for being so caught-up and distracted by her many tasks.

This could lead one to ask, "O.K. Jesus, what's more important: our rapt attention to your *words*, or our relentlessly pursuing your *work*?" Of course, that's setting-up a false dichotomy. Truly listening to the words of Jesus involves more than an audible or cerebral activity. In the same regard, faithfully serving Jesus requires more than completing a series of specific tasks. It also includes our contemplating and connecting with a deeper, spirituality. So maybe Jesus is just reminding us of the importance of *balance* - of doing those good and helpful things for others, while at the same time, *taking* time to listen for God's Still-Speaking Voice. Now I realize, that with all of the pain and trouble in this world, and the immediacy in which we hear about it, it's hard not to want to respond with swift and forceful action. Yet if we don't take the time to listen and reflect, our actions may actually end-up doing more harm than good. If we really want to *help* people, we must first *hear* them. And sometimes the quickest way to effectively handle a difficult situation, is to slow-down and carefully think it through.

Some of us are old enough to recall the saying "Idle hands are the devil's playground!" In other words, if you kids don't find something to keep yourselves busy, you're headed directly toward temptation and trouble! It seems to me, though, that these days *busy hands* can just as likely to lead to trouble - with a capital T, and that rhymes with P, and that stands for

Phones! We have cell phones, i-phones, smart-phones, silly-phones - all manner of electronic devices clamoring for our attention. And it's not just the young ones texting, tweeting, twittering, and double-thumb-typing the day-away! You'll even find supposedly mature adults driving down the highway with a cell-phone in one hand and a big Breakfast Burrito in the other - which is a real recipe for trouble! And while these modes of communication can be quite helpful, they can also be extremely harmful; especially when they divert us from paying attention to the people sitting - or driving - directly in front of us.

In this morning's reading, Mary recognizes that there is a Holy Presence sitting right in front of her, in the person of Jesus Christ. She wants to soak in that Divine Love and Grace which is being expressed in his words and through his essence. So in that moment, she drops everything else, and gives her undivided attention to Jesus. She has no idea how long he will be there, or if she will ever see him again. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem - a city full of danger for any prophet who dares to proclaim Divine compassion and justice, liberation and acceptance for all people. So Mary has a decision to make. She can get caught-up with her sister in feeding Jesus and his disciples a marvelous and memorable meal; or she can sit-down and be fed by Jesus' marvelous and memorable words. She chooses the latter, which is an excellent choice!

There are many opportunities to cook and clean, fret and fuss, scurry-about and serve; but in those special moments when we can be fully engaged with another person or group of people, we need to put aside those routine tasks, and take in the fulness of what lies before us. And while Martha certainly wasn't wrong in wanting to attend to the needs of their guests, she gets so caught-up obsessing over the details and multiple dishes, that she misses the magnificent opportunity which is literally sitting in front of her.

Jesus himself displays a remarkable ability to fully focus on the person, or persons, before him - seeing and appreciating them as uniquely precious children of the Holy One. He realizes that by carefully listening to each person, he can discern a Divinely loving way to respond to them; thereby fulfilling his own Divine purpose. He also recognizes that he can show his love for the Holy One most fully, by freely sharing his undivided attention and love with those Divine sisters and brothers who are right there with him.

While it certainly is important that you and I take care of the basic concerns of everyday Life, it's more important to remember that in Life, *people* are our real concern: family and friends, brothers and sisters, neighbors and strangers - all those people whose lives are Divinely interconnected with our own. And perhaps most importantly, it is crucial that we pay close attention to that Divine, Still-speaking Voice that calls us from our busy distractions, and reminds us to focus on the people in front of us. Because when you and I open our eyes and ears, our minds and our hearts to the people around us, the Divine Presence is most fully revealed - among us and within us!