

DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF!

Luke 10:38-42, July 18th, 2010

The story goes that a rescue party approached some trapped mountaineers in a snowy ravine. To give them some hope the rescuers shout out, "It's the Red Cross!" From the desperate men comes the reply, "Go away! We gave at the office!" Behind that story stands a serious question: What caused those who required rescue, who needed help, to see those who came to serve as the ones who needed help?

Or to tell the story in a different way, the rescuers approach the trapped mountaineers and yell, "It's the Red Cross!" The answer comes back from the trapped men, "Thank God you're here!" To which the rescuers replied, "Yeah, but don't get your hopes up, we've come to collect your contributions." This too, would be tragic because those who were to serve saw themselves as the ones to be served.

There's even a greater tragedy. Try the third version of the story. Rescuers yell to the trapped mountaineers. "It's the Red Cross! We've come for your contributions." The trapped men yell back: "Oh, we gave at the office, but since you're here, we'll give again."

Now that's absurd, isn't it? People getting mixed up in their roles about whose serving whom, but it happens all the time...when those who are to serve see themselves as the ones having to be served. What a mish-mash. It can be a little bit like the government, when the government sees the people existing for the good of the government rather than the government existing for the welfare of the people.

Jesus came to Bethany. He had set his face toward Jerusalem. He had been interrogated, made fun of, tested by questions. He was not welcome everywhere anymore.

Law abiding citizens started to shun him. When he entered Bethany not every door was open to him. But Martha came out of her house to meet him; she welcomed him. She made him sit down, she washed his feet, she offered water to wash his hands, she gave him something to drink, and he was so happy to be for a moment at a home that welcomed him.

And Martha went to the kitchen, and she brought out the food; there was noise in the pots and pans, the smell of the baking bread, the perfume of fruits and vegetables and wine, the noise of boiling water on the fire, very homey, very pleasant. Maybe the smell of lamb, and if all twelve apostles were there besides, that's a lot of people to prepare for. Those disciples could eat.

Martha was very busy and so was her sister Mary. They both wanted to receive Jesus as well as possible. They both were like Good Samaritans to him.

But Mary did more than that; she did not only serve and help, but Mary also sat down at his feet.

Martha was busy, Mary too, but Mary did something extra. Martha was like the Good Samaritan, so was Mary, but Mary did more.

And Jesus let both go their way. He appreciated Martha and her running up and down the kitchen. That running was definitely a sign of her love for him, and of her faith and hope.

Martha is doubtlessly part of him, but when Martha starts to condemn her sister for not helping her in the serving and for sitting at his feet, he speaks out and says that Mary is right in listening to him, in listening to the Lord, in listening to God.

We all should resemble the Good Samaritan but we should not forget that the story about him was preceded by the saying” “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

To have faith means to come down from your donkey or your ordinary life, to help others, to work and study in their favor.

But it also means to listen to the Lord, to pray and be attentive so that we can monitor all our service in the direction of his kingdom to come.

We have to serve our neighbor; we have to listen to the Lord. We have not sufficient Marthas among us, but they are certainly more numerous than the Marys and that is not only a pity, it means we get caught up in a lot of things that mean nothing.

The good news for Martha was sitting right there in the room with her, on his way to the cross. And the Good News for us is right here in our midst this morning. Jesus invites us to center our lives on him, who himself was centered on God and centered on what had to be done for you and me.

From his early life Jesus was centered on what God had sent him to do, for a world that had fallen among thieves. He understood how God works in this world and taught others about God’s reign. Especially in Luke’s Gospel, we find Jesus in prayer time and time again, drawing strength from God for his life and mission. Christ was definitely centered on God. If anybody could have griped about serving alone, it could have been Jesus.

He was also centered on us. He knew that he had come to save us. He came to find people who were going around and around in circles, blaming others for their situations, out of harmony with God, with others, and with themselves.

Jesus came to serve us by providing the proper center for our lives. Today’s Gospel underscores Martha’s being caught up in her task. Martha thought she was doing the serving and that Jesus was being served. Martha thought she was the host and Jesus was the guest. Not so. Later we read of another meal where the people might have had the same misunderstanding.. At the last

supper, Jesus sent his disciples to prepare the room, buy the food, and cook the meal. When everything was ready, he sat down and said, "I am among you as one who serves."

Whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper, it may look like the Altar Guild gets everything ready, and the communion assistants and pastors distribute the elements. But here too, Jesus is among us as one who serves. We call this a worship service, and most of us think we're serving God with our prayers and our praise. But Christ is here serving us with his presence and his promises.

At Martha's house, in the upper room, here at this altar, Jesus is serving us. Jesus didn't need Martha's meal to sustain his life. But Martha along with all of us, sure do need what Jesus is serving up to sustain our lives, otherwise we show what Martha showed, just bitterness and blaming when we are called upon to be Good Samaritans and show hospitality. He's serving up the good portion that cannot be taken away from us. He's serving up his Word. He's serving up his life, serving up his forgiveness. He's serving up his body and blood, serving up himself. "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Today Jesus serves up himself as the center of our lives. He invites us to center our lives in him. When we do we discover that many of the issues we face in our lives, though still hard, we meet with greater resolve. Martha, Martha, 'Don't sweat the small stuff.'

Paul says in the second lesson, "Continue in the faith, established and firm, not shifting from the hope of the Gospel which you have heard."

Like Martha in Bethany, and Abraham when the three visitors showed up, was distracted by much serving. The Lord himself had come to visit with his messengers, and Abraham is running around so much that he hardly has time to hear the message of the messengers, more of a footnote. The Lord himself had come to visit, to offer Abraham a word that would change history, eternity forever, and Abraham is running around like a caterer. "Let me fetch you a morsel of bread." Then you find out what that fetching meant. He went to Sarah and said, "Get three seahs of fine flower, and knead it and bake some bread." Then when you find out what three seahs of fine flower is, you find out that it's equal to a bushel of flour. That's a lot of flour. I wonder how long it took Sarah to bake all that bread?

Then Abraham ran to the servants, and told them to take a calf, tender and good, and prepare it. I wonder how long that took? Then Abraham took the curds and milk and the calf and set it before them: Then he stepped back and watched them eat. It sounded like it happened so fast, but for that kind of meal it would have taken far longer. The hospitality code in the middle east was that you would knock yourself out in greeting strangers. We see that reflected also in Martha.

You can almost see the Lord wondering if the old man would ever stop doing the small stuff and be able to listen to the message they were bringing concerning the promise of God that a son

would be born to aged Sarah...the really good news, not just for them but ultimately for the whole world. And that son was Isaac. Which means to laugh, to rejoice.

Of all the people in today's scriptures, perhaps it is St. Paul in the Epistle who seems to have caught the vision of not sweating the small stuff and being jerked around by it. "Now, I rejoice in my sufferings." Not an easy attitude to take, as those of you know who have experienced sufferings and tragedies. But maybe the emphasis in the sentence ought to be the first word...NOW! I REJOICE IN MY SUFFERINGS." Now? In the Epistle to the Colossians he says things like FOR IN HIM ALL THINGS WERE CREATED, ALL THINGS HAVING BEEN CREATED IN HIM AND THROUGH HIM, a grand paragraph in which he points out that Jesus is in charge, a grand paragraph in which he points out that Jesus is in charge.

This is the very message that Jesus was trying to get across to Abraham and Sarah, to Martha and Mary to Paul and to you and me. He's got the whole world in his hands, Paul states, and so now "I can rejoice in my sufferings," because even now I can begin to see his plan. The Lord is in charge, his promises are sure and certain; and that is the good news that makes it possible even to look upon things as serious as sufferings as small stuff.

And yet looking back at the vantage point of 21 centuries, it is obvious to us even if it always wasn't to Abraham and Sarah, or Martha, or even St. Paul that the Lord is in charge, that he worked things out for them, and that he is working things out for us. But if we don't let the Lord serve us by listening to him, we will get pulled around by the small stuff. And just be bitter people, blaming everyone around us, in the midst of our serving.

Martha was distracted, God's word tells us, pulled around. It happens sometimes, but when it does, the problem is that we are being pulled away from the happy promise of our God, that in Jesus Christ he is truly in charge, and that, when we listen to the story, and our involvement in it, we too will join in the laughter. In the meantime well, how did our Savior put it, our Savior who manages to put even suffering and death in their place at last? Martha, Martha, DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF. ALMOST EVERYTHING IS SMALL STUFF! COME SIT AND LISTEN TO ME! AND THEN OUR SERVING GETS PUT IN ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE WHEN WE LET JESUS SERVE US! On this day Mary chose that, the good portion, and that never will be taken away from us.

Joy be to you in Christ, David E. Hinck, pastor FGS