

Luke 10:38-42
July 17, 2016

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!
Amen.

I read not so long ago about an inner-city congregation in which attendance had declined dramatically and with it the stewarding of financial gifts. Those that remained were often at odds with one another about how to continue. The proverbial “should” was tossed to and fro. We should be doing this. We should be doing that. We should be doing what they are doing in the suburbs in those big mega churches. This will solve all the problems. Well, it didn’t and those faithful followers became more and more divided in a time it was so vital they remain united in the One who called them together. They had become distracted so easily until finally, one day. They knew they couldn’t go much further and were soon going to have to close the doors of the building. In a moment of sheer desperation they relinquished control, came together, and simply dwelt in the peaceful embrace of their Savior. It didn’t come all at once but as they prayed, as they drew together and set aside all those distractions, all those things they thought they should be doing, all the anger and strife, all the despair – slowly they began to sense a mission God was calling them to. A homeless shelter. Seeing it was this or close the doors they initiated the journey of putting a makeshift shelter together. Initially, it was just a few beds but after a while it became a shelter providing beds and a warm meal to dozens of people each night. Word got out. Volunteers came and not

only that they began to worship. And those who were homeless began to worship. They began to join. Lives were transformed. Those whose lives seemed to not matter previously, whose identity was unknown to so many, suddenly became an integral part of the community. The congregation was transformed and people were working hand-in-hand, side-by-side and gone was the separation which previously existed. Yes, it wasn't the traditional church so many of us envision but nonetheless it was church – where all were welcome, where all were loved, where Christ was worshipped and glorified, and where service was the natural response to all God had done for them.

Today's gospel can certainly be about distractions. It can lead us as a congregation and as individuals to ask the question, what distractions get in our way of sitting at the feet of Jesus? That is indeed one way we can interpret this passage but is there more? Is Jesus pitting service against spirituality here? Is he pitting one sister against another? Is he dismissing the service and hospitality Marth is showing him? Absolutely not because Luke more than any other gospel portrays a life of discipleship is marked by a life of service. The two go hand in hand. So is there more to this text then?

Yes. Hospitality was critical in antiquity. In fact, Jesus and his disciple's relied on the hospitality of the neighbor for so many of their needs. It was just a couple weeks ago Jesus sent them out two-by-two and commanded them to take virtually nothing for their journey. Jesus see the valuable ministry Martha is doing. He hears when she calls out to him, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by

myself.” And Jesus’ response is a call to come and sit at his feet with Mary. So what is he getting out here? Martha was doing exactly what was expected of her. She was fulfilling the role society of her day cast upon her. It was important work yet was this all she was called to? In the eyes of many, the answer was yes. Yet, then we find Mary kneeling at the feet of Jesus – the posture of a disciple and one knew a disciple could only be male. Yet, there she was. Perhaps, Mary had got a glimpse of exactly what Jesus had been teaching. Perhaps, she had seen a sliver of what he meant when he said the kingdom of God had come near. She had witnessed that in God’s kingdom all were invited to gather at the feet of God’s Son. Perhaps, through Jesus’ ministry and teaching Mary had been moved to push beyond boundaries put in place by the religious laws and leaders, move beyond societal norms and stereotypes and begin to imagine the possibilities and opportunities that exist in God’s kingdom. She wasn’t simply a woman. She wasn’t simply a piece of property. She was a disciple. She was a child of God. And it was this fact the world would not be able to take away from her. Perhaps, Martha simply had not caught a glimpse of that yet. Perhaps, she was fearful to sit with her sister because of what others might think or even possible negative ramifications for doing this. Perhaps, she was afraid simply to step outside of what she had always done. This is where she felt safe and secure. Yet, Jesus calls her to something new.

And this is where we are called to. To sit at the feet of our Lord. And it seems now more than ever this is where we need to be. I really don’t know how to respond to

what we daily watch on our television screens. Two more African American men shot and killed by police. A disturbed and troubled man in Dallas who opens fire on a group killing five police officers and injuring many more. Or a terrorist who steers a truck through a crowded street in Nice, France and kills nearly 100 people and injures so many more. What does one say? How do we respond? Honestly, I just don't know; however, I know to sit silent, pretend it doesn't exist or affect us in our quiet little community is absolutely not the right response. Jesus invites us to sit at his feet. He invites us to the foot of his cross. He invites us to see that he came not for some but for all. He invites us to see He came not to be served but to serve. He invites us to confront our own prejudices, stereotypes, biases, fears, hatred – recognize it, admit to it, and then be transformed by Him to be sent out with new eyes, a new heart, and a new spirit to act with love and peace. Because we are called to act. Faith without action is dead faith. (James 2:17) So, while I (and I suspect we collectively) don't know fully what to say or how to respond I know it starts here at the foot of our Lord. It starts together as we pray, seek answers, and the strength to respond. It starts by trusting God is at work and the light still dawns in a weary world. It starts by seeing each and every person matter to God. It starts as our bishop, Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America gathered with other religious leaders outside the convenience store in Baton Rouge where Alton Sterling was shot dead and prayed, held hands together, and then moved from prayer to a discussion on where God is

leading them next. They gathered, they talked, they listened, they prayed. Lord, we may not know what to do but help us to do the same: to talk, to listen, and to pray. Amen.