

Proper 11C – July 20, 2025

Colossians 1:15-28

Luke 10:38-42

A Sink Full of Dishes

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews
at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.*

Here we are... together... entering a new chapter in the life of St. Barnabas. I feel so very blessed to have been called by your vestry to serve as your Interim Rector during a time of transition. You have been blessed to have had Rev. Karen as your rector these past years. You have given Karen and Jim a thorough heartfelt farewell filled with love and appreciation. The gratitude you know lingers and will support you as you walk a new path without Karen.

As we enter this new time... let us be very clear... this new chapter of transition is not meant to be a holding pattern or a gap time between your previous rector and the priest who will be called as your next rector... which is estimated to be a year and a half to two years from now. During this transition time, a profile committee will be working with you to put together information that will best convey both the blessings and challenges of this faith community. When the time comes, the Call Committee will interview potential candidates and prayerfully discern the one who will be called as your next Rector. The work before us at this time... is to listen, discern, be patient, and to continue the faithful work of life in Christ... The work before us is to continue worshipping, praying, learning, and serving as a people who place the love of God front and center. The work of discipleship is never put on pause. The needs of the world... the hunger for God's good news of love, compassion and justice... continues at all times. The promise of committing to this good work is that there will be grace, gifts, and blessings all along the way. Challenges are practically guaranteed... and yet, in faith, we trust that with God's help... and with the support of one another... the path forward will unfold as God intends.

So, what do we think about change? Alan Jones, the retired dean of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, as written that "the only ones who like change... are babies with dirty diapers." We each fall somewhere along a spectrum of "change appreciation." Some forms of change may feel easier than others. In a time in which we are experiencing so much change and upheaval in the world, a time of transition within this beloved St. Barnabas community may not feel so welcome. And then again... time has a tendency to continue flowing... and with this flow... change keeps on rolling. In transition ministry circles, current thinking is that... the spirituality of this hectic modern time is especially about living into change and transition. Change is a constant. In this new moment, we have an opportunity to develop our tolerance for change and, beyond that, to strengthen our abilities to deal with new and unforeseen challenges. Change invites us to live fully in-the-moment... trusting that, as dear Julian of Norwich wrote at a perilous time of death and loss in the Middle Ages... "All shall be well... and all manner of things shall be well." All this is to say... I feel very blessed to be on this journey with you... and trust that we will each have the opportunity to offer our unique gifts and abilities in building up life in Christ here at St. Barnabas, in the larger community and world of which we are a part.

The gospel lesson we are offered today speaks to this new moment. What do we each have to offer at this time? Today we head to a home in Bethany to encounter two sisters who have welcomed Jesus as their guest. We know, well, Luke's story of Mary and Martha. It is a story that highlights the tension between two very different ways of being. It is a story that tempts its hearers to side either with the worker bee Martha, or the contemplative sister Mary. When we hear Jesus tell a complaining Martha that her sister Mary has chosen the "good part".... those of us who identify as a Martha may well feel frustrated and burdened... while the Mary's among us may feel affirmed. I doubt that there is anyone, however, who cannot at least relate to Martha's distracted frustration. We can almost hear drawers slamming and pans being banged around in the kitchen as Martha tries to fulfill her cultural duty to provide for her guest. But before feeling too satisfied about being a Mary who is devotedly sitting at Jesus' feet, we need to step back and see that today's gospel lesson comes on the heels of the parable of the good Samaritan. Many biblical scholars believe that the two stories both contrast and complement each other. A story about the importance of prayerful contemplation in a home in Bethany is set alongside a story of action, service, and healing that takes place on the road to Jericho. But maybe... such a dichotomy between work and contemplation... maybe such a rigid contrast... is not the point of the larger gospel message... a gospel message that is far more than a mere step-by-step "how to" manual. The Gospel, as a whole, is a road map directing us towards abundant life. The Gospel is a compass that seeks to move us beyond our self-imposed limitations into ever-greater freedom and life. The message of the Gospel seeks to integrate us... so that our prayer and our actions are not walled-off from each other but, rather, inform and nourish the whole being, the whole community and, ideally, the whole world.

As much as Martha is working to fulfill her obligations as a host, toiling away to serve her guest, her frustration and distraction reach a boiling point. Martha blatantly breaches conventional etiquette by confronting Jesus with complaints about her sister. Martha's outburst dishonors both her guest and her sister. In Eugene Peterson's version of the Bible, *The Message*, Jesus' response is described like this:

"Martha, dear Martha, you're fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it – it's the main course, and won't be taken from her."

What Jesus has to offer *is* the *main course*, the primary sustenance. His presence is front and center. His love is an invitation to stop allowing "to do" lists to dominate our lives. Rather, Jesus' radical love invites us to focus on his presence in all that we do. But, God knows, we are not always good at staying at Jesus' feet or in remaining focused on his presence in our lives. In his sonnet "Martha and Magdalene," the poet Belli ends with Martha snapping back at Jesus saying: *"So says you, but I know better. Listen if I sat around on my salvation the way she does, who'd keep the house together?"* I can relate...

In her best-selling book *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor writes that she, "surprised her many readers by confessing that she is a failure at conventional prayer." Brown writes, "When people ask me about my prayer life, I feel like a bulimic must feel when people asked her about her favorite dish."¹ Of all the various types of prayer...thanksgiving, penitence, oblation,

¹ John Buchanan, "Distracted," <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2010/062010.html>

intercession, and petition... Brown was awakened to a new understanding of prayer by being in the kitchen with her friend Benedictine monk Brother David Lawrence. Brown learned that the heart of prayer was “waking up” to God’s presence in ordinary activities. Her understanding of prayer grew as she witnessed Brother Lawrence praising God “while peeling potatoes and making pancakes.” Here, Barbara describes the experience of becoming aware of Brother Lawrence’s practice of prayer:

“When I am fully alert to whatever or whoever is right in front of me; when I am electrically aware of the tremendous gift of being alive; when I am able to give myself wholly to the moment I am in, then I am in prayer.”²

She learned from Brother David... that “...even biting into a tomato can be a kind of prayer.”

“You cannot watch the sun come up, cradle an infant in your arms, feel a catch in your breath as the [symphony orchestra’s] horn section announces the familiar theme of Beethoven’s Fifth; you cannot ponder the grace of a friend, the forgiveness of one you offended, the touch of a beloved’s hand when you are alone, without being in prayer.”³

In her book *The Quotidian Mysteries*, “quotidian” describing the mundane, ordinary, everyday experiences of our lives, the writer Kathleen Norris offers:

“We want life to have meaning, we want fulfillment, healing, and even ecstasy, but the human paradox... is that we find these things by starting where we are, not where we wish we were. We must look for blessings to come from unlikely, everyday places.”⁴

A first look into Luke’s story of two sisters might lead to the conclusion that contemplation wins. But Jesus knows well the heart of worker bee Martha. As Martha toils away, Jesus sees into her, recognizing that Martha’s heart is in the right place. So... he calls to her inner turmoil: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing.” And what is that one thing? Jesus is saying, essentially: “learn from Mary, that you may know me in your work... and let Mary learn from you, that she may know my presence when she is not sitting at my feet...

Sit, rest, be with me for this time.

The dishes can wait.

Your guest desires your most precious gift...

Your full attention.

You.

Come be with me.

Lay down your labors for this time...

that your work may be

blessed by the love we share...

It is a beautiful lesson for this day,

...and for the days of flowing change to come...

Amen...

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kathleen Norris, *The Quotidian Mysteries*, p. 12.