

2019 07 21 – Adding Patience

Luke 10:25-37

How many of you have ever had unexpected guest arrive at your home? What did you feel when they arrived? (*wait for answers - delighted, happy, honoured, overwhelmed, anxious, tired*) What did you do to make them feel welcome? (*wait for answers – offered drink/food, made up a bed, made a special dinner, pulled something out of the freezer, went to a restaurant*)

No doubt, Martha was experiencing many of these same feelings when Jesus arrived unexpectedly in her village and in her home. We know from today's scripture reading that she got very busy doing whatever she thought was required to make Jesus comfortable.

It's interesting to compare how the different translations of the Bible describe Martha's busyness. *The Inclusive Bible*, that was read today, said, "Martha was busy with all the details of hospitality." Eugene Peterson in *The Message*, writes "Martha was pulled away by all she had to do in the kitchen." The Contemporary English Version indicates that, "Martha was worried about all that had to be done." And the New Revised Standard Version suggests, "Martha was distracted by her many tasks." So we have "busy," "pulled away," "worried," and "distracted."

Those of us that have been in Martha's shoes can understand her busyness. We are certainly aware of the many tasks associated with hospitality. Some of

us may even know what it's like to want to be with our guests but to "pulled away" to the kitchen. That's one of the reasons that so many of our newer homes no longer have a wall between the kitchen and dining room. I'm sure we are also well aware of the "worry" involved in making sure that nothing is forgotten. How many of us have finished a special meal only to find the dinner rolls in the microwave or one of the salads in the fridge.

I think the translation that I struggled with the most was the one where Martha is described as "distracted." How can you say that someone who is focussed on the task of hospitality is "distracted?" It feels like an insult, doesn't it?

And, on top of that, we have Martha's sister, Mary. Our story tells that as soon as Jesus arrived, Mary "seated herself at Jesus' feet and listened to his words." She did nothing to help Martha. Of course Martha was frustrated, angry, and no doubt, impatient, with the situation. It's not surprising that she came to Jesus and said, "Rabbi, don't you care that my sister has left me all alone to do the household tasks? Tell her to help me!" There's nothing worse than feeling overburdened and having your spouse, your adult children, or your siblings sitting idle and ignoring your struggle.

But Jesus didn't do what Martha asked, did he? Instead Jesus replied, "Martha Martha! You're anxious and upset about so many things, but only a few things are necessary – really only one. Mary has chosen the better part, and she won't be deprived of it." So what is Jesus' saying? What does he expect Martha to do?

In an attempt to answer that question I want to share with you part of a blog that I found this week on the Internet. This blog is posted by a young mother, writer and teacher named Amy Zoe Schonhoff and she writes:

These days, I am often confronted with my desire to “get things done” running headlong against my children’s need for my attention, right now, on their schedule, in the way that is best for them. The conflict between the way I want things to be and the way they are, often shows up as a lack of patience with my children.

When impatience arises within me, I find I’m not only resisting the flow of life, I’m also not living in the present moment. Typically, I’m multiple steps ahead of the moment, trying to push things along to get somewhere other than “here.”

I am slowly beginning to recognize that my impatience is actually an invitation back to the present moment. It is a warning sign that I’m slipping away from what is right in front of me—my children. The question I’m left to continually ask myself is, how do I work with life (rather than against it) as [life] is showing up for me in this moment? The answer is always a little different, but it almost always includes s-l-o-w-i-n-g d-o-w-n.

<https://mindfulheartland.com/being-patient-with-impatience/>

I believe Jesus is inviting Martha back to the present moment. He is telling her that she needs to be focussed on what is right in front of her. Martha is

privileged with having Jesus in her home and he isn't going to there for a long time. She needs to take advantage of this visit. Like Amy, Martha's impatience is a sign that she needs to stop and connect with the present.

She needs to realize that her busyness is based on her own set of expectations. It's possible that Jesus will be happy with a cold meal or a less than pristine bed. Maybe, Jesus will need a break after his teaching giving Mary a chance to help her sister with the chores. Jesus is telling Martha that she needs to let go of her worry and her busyness. She needs to focus on what is truly important and not be distracted or pulled away by her own or someone else's rules or expectations.

Don't get me wrong, hospitality is important and so is taking care of our neighbour. Jesus knew that. In fact, the previous story in the gospel of Luke was The Good Samaritan. Some scholars have suggested that the author used the Good Samaritan story to emphasize "love of neighbour," and the Martha & Mary story to emphasize "love of God." By being present in the moment, by focussing on the "one thing," on Jesus' word, Martha will be brought closer to the God of love and life.

In the Buddhist tradition, focussing on the present is referred to as "mindfulness." Practicing mindfulness is about being aware of all of our senses: what we see, what we smell, what we touch, what we taste and what we hear. When we practice mindfulness, then we become aware of the beauty that surrounds us in each moment and we feel gratitude for all that we have received. When we

practice mindfulness, then we leave space in our hearts and our minds for the Spirit to enter.

There are many things in this life that challenge our patience, many obstacles both large and small. But one of the ways to deal with our impatience is to be present and to live in each moment. Just this week I heard the story of a woman who is struggling through chemotherapy for stage four cancer. In the midst of her pain and suffering she is living in the moment and finding joy in simple things like her garden. In fact, just this spring, she ignored what might be coming in her future and planted an apple tree in her backyard.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a well-known Buddhist monk, says

“The best way to take care of the future
is to take care of the present moment.”

So the next time you feel impatience with a particular person or situation, stop, and take a moment to just be. Use all your senses to notice everything around you and within you. Revel in a deep connection with God and with the universe. Then and only then choose a way to work with life rather than against it.