



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

July 22, 2007

Pentecost 8

In September we will begin an 8 week a study of the Episcopal Church and our Anglican Heritage. The study is called VIA MEDIA and part of it will take an honest look at what has been termed the three legged footstool of Anglicanism. Scripture, Reason and Tradition. The Anglican Approach to scripture is that we first of all acknowledge that we are dealing with not just one book or author, but 66 books and several authors that make up the Bible. The other very important acknowledgement of the Anglican Church is that we are dealing with books that have undergone several translations.

Even the beloved King James Version of the Bible has words in italics. It is not that the words in italics are more important, it is simply that the translators, when they could not translate a word, would finish the sentence, then go back and read the incomplete sentence, and insert the word that they felt made sense of the sentence. So in all honesty in the King James Version we have a little guess work in the translation.

I tell you this because our gospel this morning is an example of a story that has been constantly mishandled through translations and points of emphasis in many manuscripts. It is referred to as the story of Martha and Mary but Luke is very clear from the introduction that this is Martha's story not Mary's. In the middle ages this story was given dominical authority for preferring the contemplative to the active life. This is an attitude that still prevails today. The emphasis on Mary had such an impact because there are no less than 5 translations of verses 41 and 42.

Some of the most ancient texts omit the reference to being anxious and troubled. It reads: Martha, Mary has chosen the good portion which shall not be taken away from her.

What that does is change the emphasis of Jesus. When you add the words about being troubled and anxious it is as if Jesus is belittling Mary in comparison to Martha. When you read the ancient text without those words Jesus now simply defends Mary. He does not praise her now to the denigration of Martha. Mary is not to be deprived of the thing she does well but what she does well is now not superior to what Martha does.

The reason I want to talk about this today is that I hear many times, I am a Martha or I am A Mary.

We have come to use Martha and Mary as justifications for our activity or our inactivity.

When we read this story in its earliest writing what we learn is both are important. Certainly we must learn from Jesus but we must also put what we learn into works.

We read this story and Martha was simply about her business in getting ready for dinner. Nothing out of the ordinary.

And that's the point.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

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Too often we are led to believe that it is the extraordinary acts that make up works of faith.

I was talking to some kids one time about the church and I asked them what the most important part of the church was. One kid said the door.

I was sure it was because of boredom or something so I asked why the door. She said because only after we leave church we get to do what we are supposed to be doing, helping other people.

And she was right.

But think about who you leave with-your family. We each are called to live out our life with our family. Our friends, our work places, our schools, the stores, the gas station, wherever we meet any of God's children, that is our field of mission where we live out our works.

And then we have many opportunities at St. John's to collectively show our faith in works. Parking cars may not sound like mission but believe me people see a face that represents not only St. John's but Christ. Fish fries, repair affair, work weeks, reading camps, putting together eagles wings, preparing breakfast, serving at the altar, serving on a committee and all the other opportunities we have at St. John's, allows us to show the face of Christ to our community of faith and the community at large.

All of us are called by Christ to a life of prayer and learning from Christ. Yet all of us are called to put that prayer and learning into action. It is not an either or decision.

One of my favorite stories is about the Ayatollah Khomeini when he was leader of Iran. Before his death he suffered many illnesses and during one of these illnesses the other Iranian clerics called all the faithful warriors of Islam to the square in Tehran on behalf of the ayatollah. They announced that only a supreme act of bravery could save the Ayatollah's life. If someone was courageous enough to allow his still beating heart to be ripped out of his chest the Ayatollah would live. As if from one throat, 100,000 soldiers volunteered to take upon themselves the responsibility of helping their leader live. Choose me choose me they all shouted. From the balcony above the clerics declared that since all had volunteered Allah must chose. Let the one upon whom this feather lands be chosen to give his life. The feather was dropped onto the sea of upturned faces and from a hundred thousand throats came the sound of phht.....phht.....phht.

Jesus will never ask you to rip out your heart, but he does ask you to condition your heart to respond to the needs of others. To not choose whether you are a Martha or a Mary but to see how what you learn as a Mary can be put into action as a Martha.

Amen.

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