

Wednesday Worship—People Jesus Met

5th August 2020

Martha and Mary

Opening prayers

In the name of Jesus Christ, let us worship God.

As the people of God said long ago, in the house of the Lord,

I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.

I will thank you forever, because of what you have done.

All **In the presence of the faithful I will proclaim your name, for it is good.**

(Psalm 52:8-9)

Praise the God of creation:

All **who made us to be in relationship.**

Praise the Christ of love:

All **who calls us friends.**

Praise the Spirit of peace:

All **who enables us to live in unity.**

Introduction

In this fourth service in our series on 'People Jesus Met', we meet up with Martha and Mary. They are two very different sisters, each loving Jesus in their own ways, and both loved by him. One, though, needs to learn that there's more to following Jesus than just doing more and more things for him. Jesus also just wants our company, to sit with us and talk to us and listen to us, like a friend.

Hymn: To be in your presence

Prayers with lighting of a candle

We worship and adore you, God of love who created us;
who every moment preserves and sustains us;
who has loved us with an everlasting love,
and given us the light of the knowledge of your glory
in the face of Jesus Christ.

All **We praise you, O God,
we acknowledge you to be the Lord.**

We glory in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;
who though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor;
who went about doing good
and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom;
who was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin;
who became obedient unto death, even the death on the cross;

who was dead and is alive for evermore;
who opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers;
who now lives and reigns in the glory of the Father.

All **You are the King of Glory, O Christ.**

We rejoice in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and Giver of life,
by whom we are born into the family of God,
and made members of the Body of Christ;
whose witness confirms us;
whose wisdom teaches us;
whose power enables us;
who waits to do for us exceedingly abundantly
above all that we ask or imagine.

All **All praise to you, O Holy Spirit.**

Ist Reading: Isaiah 55

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Prayer of response

Lord we thank you
that you are a generous God who offers freely.
Help us to respond to you, listen to you,
and be generous in our turn.
All **Amen.**

Psalm 25.1-10

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Prayer of response

Lord, you are our hope and our help.
Hear us when we cry to you,
forgive us our wrongdoing,
and teach us your ways, we pray.

All **Amen.**

2nd Reading: 2 Timothy 3.14-end

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

Prayer of response

Lord, help us to stay firm in faith.
May we keep the scriptures always before us,
that we may learn and grow in faith and goodness.

All **Amen.**

3rd Reading: Luke 10.38-42

Now as they went on their way, [Jesus] entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

Prayer of response

Lord our God,
save us from always being so busy
that we forget to spend time with you.
Help us to remember that you love us
and long to spend time with us.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: Dear Lord and Father of mankind

Reflection

“Do you suppose God enjoys having you around?”

This is the question that a vicar asks of his curate in the book ‘Love for the Lost’ by Catherine Fox, who’s written a series of books about the Church of England and is married to the Bishop of Sheffield.

It’s a book I greatly enjoyed, although I wouldn’t recommend it if you don’t like swearing and references to sex.

The question throws the curate, Isobel, completely and the vicar, Harry, continues, “You don’t think He might quite like your company – even on your day off? When you’re not actually trying to serve Him, I mean?”.

“Isobel turned the question over. There was a lump in her throat, which she couldn’t swallow away. ‘No’, she admitted. ‘I suppose I don’t really believe anyone *enjoys* my company”.

Reading this my heart goes out to Isobel, who ends up having a breakdown.

I can relate to her, having had a lot of trouble in the past with believing that people want to be around me.

It’s also an occupational hazard of people in licensed or ordained ministry to think we must be always busy doing something to serve God and prove ourselves worthy.

But the story of Martha and Mary turns all that upside down.

It’s important, first, to be clear that this story is not about Martha-bashing.

Martha is being a good host, trying to make Jesus feel welcome, and doing good, practical work.

We need people like that in the church.

I know we’re not in normal church mode right now but generally for every theologian or person standing up front we need many people who will unlock and clean the church, sort out the sound system, make sure everything is in the right place at the right time, get the tea and coffee ready, sort out admin and do any number of other jobs.

And now we need video makers and editors, people to get supplies of hand sanitisers, people to make sure the church is disinfected, encouragers, innovators who can help us respond creatively to our challenges, and so on.

The problem is not that Martha is doing things for Jesus.

The problem is that Martha is focusing on the wrong thing.

Jesus sees that she's anxious and distracted, and calls her to come and sit with him, not because she shouldn't do things for him but because it's not the right thing for that time and place, and it's making her unhappy and irritable.

It's easy to get caught up in thinking we have to be busy all the time for God.

We think if we do all this stuff then we're being good followers of Jesus.

But what Jesus prioritises is spending time with us.

He actually does enjoy our company – even when we're not trying to serve him.

And he doesn't ask us to wear ourselves out and make ourselves miserable for him.

If what we're doing brings us closer to God, and we can spend time with him, then that's great.

But if we're tired, grumpy and not talking to God for days on end because we're too busy doing things, then something's gone wrong, and we may be on course for burnout or worse.

So, what can we do?

It's important to carve out some time to just sit with God like Mary did, in prayer, reading the Bible and other helpful books.

We don't have to have special postures or places to do this, unless you find it helpful.

We can be with God in the garden, pottering around the house, going for a walk, driving the car.

Anywhere, really, we can switch off the pressure in our minds to be always thinking and doing and worrying, and just turn to God for a moment of peace and companionship.

I've recently been exploring the Examen.

I didn't know much about it but thought it meant just going over all the things you'd done wrong during the day.

But now I've discovered it's much more positive than that.

It involves spending a bit of time at the end of a day thinking about what brought you consolation or desolation during the day and talking to God about it.

It's quite simple but it helps you see where God might be speaking to you in the joys and sorrows of your life, and what he might be leading you towards by noting what is positive and what isn't in your life.

There's a lot of information online about it, as well as books including this one – 'Sleeping with Bread'.

I know it looks like a children's book but it actually isn't.

But however you want to get closer to God, remember that God does enjoy having you around.

Amen.

Intercessions

Our God, we give you thanks:

For those who have gone before us and from whose questions, struggles to know and wisdom we benefit.

Thank you for the Marys and Marthas of our life and our church.

For the gifts of new possibilities that await ... just there ... in spite of our distraction.

For those who see things we cannot because of our fear, our experience, our knowing ...

For those who wonder in ways that surprise us, invite us and challenge us.

For those who work so hard and continue to do so even when we take them for granted, when we betray them, when we neglect to treat them with justice or respect, when we assume and presume and then are shocked at their rebellion.

Our God, we give you thanks that it is not all about us, that you continue to care and to love and to create possibilities of redemption and new life not only among us but throughout your world.

Help us get over ourselves enough to be able to sit in your presence, like Mary.

Help us to have the humility and the courage to wonder, if only for a moment, if you are about something game changing.

Help us to carry that same spirit of curiosity and discovery out into the world in which we serve and which you love.

So let us, in your name, dare to hope.

Let us dare to hope.

For peace and justice across the world.

For an end to the coronavirus pandemic.

For help for the poor and needy.

For comfort and healing for the sick and dying.

Let us dare to hope that you have not forgotten us, even at this place and time in our lives.

Make us a dangerous people – for once not to each other
but to all those resentments, preconceptions
and reasons why your future should not be the future,
for your church AND for your creation.

We only dare such craziness
because we sit in the presence of One whose prayer we echo,
praying in confidence, as our Saviour has taught us,

All **Our Father, which art in heaven...**

Hymn: Christ is made the sure foundation

Closing prayers

Heavenly Father,
we share together the blessing of your presence.
Give us in this life knowledge of your truth,
and in the world to come life everlasting;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Now may the Lord of peace himself
give us peace at all times and in every way.
The Lord be with us all;
and the blessing...

All **Amen.**

To him who is able to keep us from falling
and to present us without blemish
before the presence of his glory with rejoicing,
to the only God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, dominion and authority,
before all time and now and for ever.

All **Amen.**