

SERMON FOR JULY 21, 2013

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)
7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: **Luke 10:38-42 (Focus)**

Message: **"Listening to GOD's Word!"**



I DON'T GET IT. IF MARTHA
STOPS WORKING, WHO'S
GOING TO MAKE LUNCH?



WWW.AGNUSDAY.ORG

IT'S NOT ABOUT WHAT MARTHA
NEEDS TO DO. IT'S ABOUT
WHAT JESUS WILL DO.
MARY KNOWS THAT.



HE'S GOING TO
ORDER TAKEOUT!



LUKE 10:38-42

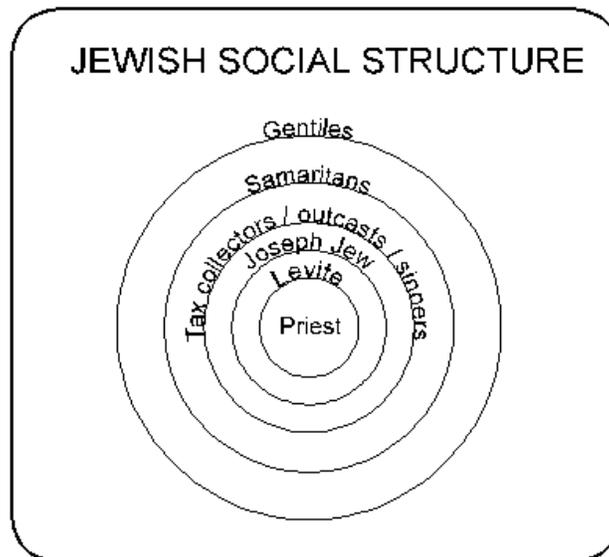
© WETZSTEIN 13.07.17

Gathering in the Word

Prayer: O Lord Jesus, put us all in touch with the joy of your presence, grace, and mercy and let it open us to life. Amen.

Today's scripture readings (**Amos 8:1-12, Colossians 1:15-28, and Luke 10:38-42**) are plentiful in possibilities—including that we will suffer serious consequences if we move away from God's vision of Shalom which means right relationships in all areas—with GOD, neighbor, and the earth! **Being open to GOD's vision opens us to lively and transformative energies and contributes to a healing neighborhood and world.**

Our focus story of Luke 10 brings together many themes and ideas from Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom. Samaritans (continuing our story from last Sunday) are "hapa" and "half-breeds" by Jesus' fellow Jews.



The Samaritans were a mixed group, believed to have been the descendants of intermarriages between Jews and local Gentiles, notably the Philistines, Edomites, Syrians, and Moabites. The Samaritans had a relatively simple faith, almost that of the Jews, but using only the Torah (five books of Moses), rejecting the "writings" (Psalms and other historic, poetic, and metaphorical

works) and the "prophets" (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so forth to Malachi). Their worship focused towards a mountain in Samaria rather than the mountain in Jerusalem, and their version of the Torah differed from the Jewish Torah in naming this mountain as the center of their worship.

Here Jesus is once again "tweaking" assumptions and breaking out of the conventional boxes: "In the Kingdom of God, the outcasts and half-breeds and those who are last can move to the front of the line!"

Hearing the Word

Luke 10:38-42 (The VOICE Bible 2012)

This story brings together many themes from Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom. Samaritans are seen as "hapa" and "half-breeds" by Jesus' fellow Jews—racially mixed and also religiously compromised. By making a Samaritan the hero of the story, Jesus is once again tweaking (*"tweaking, fine-tuning, changing"*) assumptions and breaking out of conventional boxes: "In the kingdom of God," Jesus is saying, "the outcasts and last can move to the front of the line." The focus for Jesus is not on the kinds of sophisticated arguments preferred by the religious scholar; for Jesus the kingdom of God is about living life, and in particular, living a life of love for God and for neighbor—whoever that neighbor may be.

³⁸ Jesus continued from there *toward Jerusalem* and came to another village. Martha, a resident of that village, welcomed Jesus into her home. ³⁹ Her sister, Mary, went and sat at Jesus' feet, listening to Him teach.

⁴⁰ Meanwhile Martha was anxious about all the hospitality arrangements.

Martha (*interrupting Jesus*): Lord, why don't you care that my sister is leaving me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to get over here and help me.

Jesus: ⁴¹ Oh Martha, Martha, you are so anxious and concerned about a million details, ⁴² but really, only one thing matters. Mary has chosen that one thing, and I won't take it away from her.

The Gospel of Luke generally places (among the other 3 Gospels) a premium on **service**, on **diakonia**; Yet Martha's service is apparently criticized by Jesus in verse 40. Remember earlier that in Luke 10 Jesus gave advice to the 70/72 mission workers that when they were welcomed into someone's house—they were to eat whatever was set before them (Luke 10:8).

Yet here in Martha's busy preparations to feed Jesus—we seem to be met with the opposite effect and Martha herself is looked down on. Also last Sunday's **Parable of the Good Samaritan** the bottom line was "Go and **do** likewise."

So what's going on that changes things and instead of Jesus advocating an active ministry of mercy and neighborliness—Jesus is looking sideways and suspiciously at Martha who is **doing** a lot---verses her sister Mary who is content and comfortable with just sitting and listening?

Question for all of us: in the larger scheme and plan of things—what do we learn from today's Gospel of Luke 10:38-42? What particular aspect of life before the face of GOD is being addressed here?

Hospitality (*welcome, warmth, kindness, generosity we offer to guests or strangers*): How do we receive Jesus? What do we think is Jesus' first priority when he comes into a person's home?

- ✓ Martha seems to get it down and attends to the demands of hosting. There are not a lot of details as to what she's up to.
- ✓ We're not even sure what Jesus is saying to Sister Mary!

But what seems sure and clear here is that service is important!

- ✓ Jesus deserved to be served and have a meal dished out for him.
- ✓ Jesus did have a reputation for going to a lot of nice dinner parties!
- ✓ Earlier Jesus told his followers to eat whatever was set before them—be it simple or extravagant with lots of food!
- ✓ Jesus did gratefully eat what Martha set down on the table before him.

So far so good. The problem was not in the fact that Martha served—no word of rebuke or scolding would have come to Martha had Martha not taken the initiative to ask Jesus to scold Mary for not lending a hand. It was only then that Martha came in for some criticism by Jesus.

- ✓ Service is good.
- ✓ Service is lovely, in fact in its own way a “needful thing.”
- ✓ Jesus says nothing here to undercut and challenge the idea that hospitality and service are noble endeavors and the right thing also for disciples to do.

But if and when we elevate that form of hospitality over hearing, listening and pondering the Word of GOD—if and when we think, therefore, that Jesus himself is more interested in haute cuisine (*preparing and cooking of high*

quality foods) than in the Bread of Heaven that alone gives us life—that is when we and Martha got in trouble!

This is the “better portion” that Mary had chosen.

- ✓ The Greek in verse 42 is saying to us—“One thing is needed: therefore, Mary has elected the good **portion** and it will not be taken from her.”
- ✓ There may be a bit of **pun** (*witticism or a clever remark*) going on here in that **portion** in the Old Testament often referred to a literal food portion at a meal.
- ✓ If so—then Martha’s complaint about Mary’s lack of help with the meal preparation & serving was answered by Jesus with a **pun** to say that Mary had seen the true banquet that had been laid before her that evening and choose to “eat” a portion of that meal—which spiritually speaking is a lot more important than all the portions of a physical meal combined.

No matter how good supper had been that evening—the better meal being served was the one falling from Jesus lips and being lapped up by Mary as she sat at the Master’s feet! Given the superlative value of Jesus’ spiritual banquet—even a good portion would be the “better’ portion indeed!

In this sense then—this brief incident and story could be described as “a tale of two suppers.”

Jesus may or may not be elevating contemplation over service—we Christians generally need both—and not have to choose between one or the other!

Both Mary and Martha recognized Jesus as Lord:

- ✓ Mary recognizing Jesus as her Lord via her posture and Martha hails Jesus as her Lord via her direct addressing Jesus as “Lord.”

- ✓ But only one of the two sisters initially recognized what the *presence* of the Lord meant.
 - Martha saw the Lord as one worthy of being served as fine a meal as she could do.
 - But Mary seemed to sense that the Son of Man as Lord did not come to BE served but to serve.

The key way this Lord Jesus served was by dishing up the Word of Life. Mary knew this and took in that Word. Martha initially missed it.

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of God for us this morning?

1. ONE: LET EACH OF US BE OUR LORD JESUS' PRESENCE TO ONE ANOTHER!

- ✓ Martha did get the short end of the *gospel straw* but without her Jesus would not have been fed!
- ✓ The challenge is that Martha's actions add to the anxiety (*nervousness, worry, unease, angst*) she and others experience—it got in the way of an enjoyable evening among friends. Martha got distracted.
- ✓ Mary is totally focused on Jesus. This is Mary's (and perhaps Martha's too) calling in the present moment.

2. TWO: BREATHE IN DEEPLY AND BE NOURISHED BY GOD'S WORD SO YOU CAN SERVE!

- ✓ We the Church—TFCCCH—are nourished and fed by GOD's Word!
- ✓ GOD's word shows, helps and tells us what GOD's mission is for us here at TFCCCH—yet we all must talk, discover GOD's mission—and agree!
- ✓ We are having discussion in the days ahead!

3. THREE: REST IN GOD'S HOLY PRESENCE AND KNOW YOU ARE LOVED AND VALUED AS GOD'S SON AND DAUGHTERS!

- ✓ The Son of Man as Lord did not come to BE served but to serve!
- ✓ We are GOD's Beloved Community!
- ✓ Let us all be *truly present in Jesus—all of us!*
- ✓ We are challenged by GOD to get to know one another (there are 350 people in our 3 worship services each Sunday!).

Sent in the Word

Sisters and brothers, we do know that Jesus invites all of us who are worried and distracted by many things to sit and rest in his presence, to hear his words of grace and truth, to know that we are loved and valued as children of God, to be renewed in faith and strengthened for service. There is need of only one thing: attention to our guest—who is Jesus. As it turns out, our guest Jesus is also our host, with abundant gifts to give.

Share that word with others!