

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

July 17, 2016
Proper 11C / Ordinary 16C / Pentecost +9

The readings this week:
• Amos 8:1-12 • Psalm 52
• Colossians 1:15-28 • Luke 10:38-42



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Mary, Martha and My Dad

There are few passages that have caused more consternation among Christians than this one. It almost feels like a set up -- an intentional contrast between the contemplative and active life or, if you're prone to identify with Martha, the contemplative life and the responsible one.

This consternation has been felt especially keenly by women, who often by necessity played the role of Martha, making sure the kids were in school, supper was on the table, the bills were in order, and the household ran smoothly. For so much of history the primary if not exclusive domain of women was domestic, and so it's perhaps understandable if women, upon hearing this parable, felt like Jesus was somehow belittling these roles and responsibilities. To tell you the truth, though, I don't think this parable is about Mary, or Martha either, for that matter. I think this parable is about my dad.

Just before I entered the 10th grade, my dad, a pastor, took a call to a new church, and so my family moved to a new town. This church had a different sound system than the church we left, with lavalier microphones that the pastor controlled from a little handset that you kept in your pocket. That was new for my dad and sometimes he'd forget to turn it off after saying a prayer or preaching the sermon, which meant that if we started singing a hymn you could hear the sound of my dad singing just above everyone else.

Now my dad...was not a great singer. He wasn't tone deaf, for sure; it's just that he pretty regularly managed to sing more than a few notes slightly off key. I was 15 at the time, brand new to this church, school, and community, and eager -- okay, make that desperate -- to make new friends and to be accepted, and so when I heard the sound of my dad singing just off-key and a little louder than everyone else, I would cringe.

This went on fairly regularly for much of the fall. But on one of those Sundays when we were still relatively new to that church and town, when my dad had again forgotten to turn off the mic so that you could hear his off key-singing just above everyone else, and when I was again cringing in embarrassment, my mom noticed what was happening. I'm pretty sure she didn't

approve of my reaction, but she didn't frown, or roll her eyes, or do any of the things parents are prone to do when they see their children overreacting to something. Instead, she leaned over to me, smiled understandingly, and then whispered, "You know, when your dad is gone, I'll miss his singing."

My mom understood, you see, something that I had totally missed: that sometimes you get so caught up in the act of singing that you forget all about yourself -- you forget your insecurities and embarrassments, your limitations and your failings -- you forget all the stuff you usually worry about and you just sing.

I think that's the "better part" Jesus is talking about. He's not favoring Mary over Martha, and he's not lifting up one way of living the Christian life over another. Rather, he's inviting us to get caught up in the joy of being in his presence such that we forget, if only for a little while, all the usual things that hold us back, all the usual worries and headaches and concerns, and simply be, as the Apostle Paul was wont to put it, "in Christ."

Even amid the hustle and bustle of fulfilling one's mission, Jesus seems to say, there is still nothing more important than to live in the "eternal now" of one's relationship with God.

Here, then, is a spirituality as easily practiced in the kitchen as in the study, at school or at play, while working the farm or looking for work. What matters is not so much what you are doing, but the attentiveness to God's presence and purpose in, with, under all our varied activities and responsibilities.

Many of us need to be reminded of what's important, of what matters, of what is of ultimate significance. It's so easy to get caught up in the necessary busy-ness of our diverse responsibilities in this life.

So, I guess this story isn't about Mary, or about Martha, or even about my dad. I guess it's really about Jesus and how much Jesus wants to draw each and all of us into a relationship that lifts us beyond the everyday limitations of this life that we might glimpse, if only for a few moments at a time, the sacred in the mundane, the extraordinary in the ordinary, and the holiness with which each and every moment of this life is imbued.

Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: Amos 8:1-12

What images does Amos use that the people of Israel would have understood? What meaning would these images have to the people of Israel? Why was God bringing judgement to the land? How were the merchants breaking the Jewish law with their trade practices? What does God declare through Amos that will happen to the people? How does Amos describe the lifestyle of those who are ripe for judgment? How does he describe the "harvest" they will experience? Even though we can freely read the Bible, how does "famine" evidence itself among God's people? [Nurturing Faith, Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Psalm Reading: Psalm 52

Who will God destroy forever? To what does the psalmist compare himself? What can we learn about the wicked from this Psalm? What can we learn about the righteous from this Psalm? What can we learn about God from this Psalm? [Doing Good Ministries, Magnify!](#)

When the prophet Amos walked down the main drag, it was like a shoot-out in the Old West. Everybody ran for cover. His special target was The Beautiful People, and shooting from the hip, he never missed his mark. He pictures them sleek and tanned at Palm Beach, Acapulco, St. Tropez. They glisten with Bain de Soleil. The stereo is piped out over the marble terrace. Another tray of bloody Marys is on the way. A vacationing bishop plunges into the heated pool.

With one eye cocked on them, he has his other cocked on the Unbeautiful People—the varicose veins of the old waiter, the pasty face of the starch-fed child, the Indian winos passed out on the railroad siding, the ragged woman fumbling for food stamps at the check-out counter.

When justice is finally done, Amos says, there will be Hell to pay. The Happy Hour will be postponed indefinitely because the sun will never make it over the yard-arm. The Pucci blouses, the tangerine colored slacks, the flowered Lillys, will all fade like grass. Nothing but a few chicken bones will mark the place where once the cold buffet was spread out under the royal palms.

But according to Amos, it won't be the shortage of food and fun that will hurt. It will be the shortage "of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). Towards the end, God will make himself so scarce that the world won't even know what it's starving to death for.

~ Frederick Buechner, initially published in *Peculiar Treasures* and later in *Beyond Words*

Praying Toward Sunday

*As Martha offers hospitality to the stranger
As Mary listens carefully to your word
May we learn from our sisters to
Be your hands and heart in the world.
Amen.*

Terri, [RevGalBlogPals](#)

3rd Reading: Colossians 1:15-28

What does it mean that Jesus is the "image" of God? In what ways does He uniquely display the character and activity of "the invisible God" according to this passage? What range of meanings can the word 'firstborn' have? What is the likeliest meaning of the word in this passage considering the surrounding context? How does Paul's description of Christ change from 1:15-18a to 1:18b-20? What is reconciliation? Why is it needed? How was it made possible? Who will enjoy it? When will it be finally accomplished? In what ways does Paul establish both the deity and humanity of Jesus in this passage? What happens if you deny one or the other? Why do you think God allows you to suffer or endure difficulties? What might He want to accomplish in you or through you? [Grace Bible](#)

4th Reading: Luke 10:38-42

When you are sad, or tired, or discouraged, what do you turn to for refreshment? Why is Martha so upset and frustrated? Read John 11:17-44. Combined with the passage in Luke, what are the basic temperaments or personalities of the two women? What are the strengths of being a "Martha" in life and ministry? What are the weaknesses? What are the common results you experience when you lose your focus on God? Who, or what, do you blame when your life becomes chaotic? In verse 41, how does Jesus refocus Martha's perspective? This passage invites us to see Jesus Himself as our 'portion.' Apart from Christ, what things do you treat as your 'portion'? In other words, where are you tempted to look for life apart from Christ? What insight does this passage provide as to how we should see our time with the Lord? [Cru Community](#)

