

Holy Rest

Luke 10:38-42

Good Morning Church Family and to our family joining us online. Welcome.

By a show of hands, how many people here make new year's resolutions? While it would seem like this practice is falling out of vogue somewhat, I know there are folks who still do it. There are those who are super ambitious with their resolutions -I'm going to run a marathon this year! I'm going to lose 50 pounds! I'm going to build my own computer! Bless their little hearts. Some folks take a more moderate approach. Try to read more books. Drink more water, less coffee. When we were driving through Minneapolis/St. Paul, on the way home from my sister's house, all the electronic signs along the interstate had these words on them: "New Year. New You. Use your blinker."

The spirit behind new year's resolutions, no matter if it's running a marathon or using your blinker, is to set a goal, an intention as you step into a new year. It's about setting priorities, and usually about doing more, adding something. Our text for this morning tells a story, again through the eyes of women, about priorities.

Jesus heads to home of his dear friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. We could reasonably assume that there were quite a few people gathered in the home, men and women, other friends from the community who had come to spend time with Jesus, the

guest of honour. Mary as the matriarch of the home is busy getting things ready. There's cleaning to be done, food to be prepared, hospitality to be practiced. The world of Jesus was more patriarchal than our own. Martha was doing what was expected of women and the role that women occupied in serving others, in being charge of household matters. Martha is tending to the hospitality, maybe preparing the meal, and she looks around and notices her sister is absent. She then looks around and sees everything that still needs to be done. And I imagine Martha, rightfully so, getting a little grumpy. "It's fine, she thinks, Mary will show up shortly, and she pounds the unleavened bread a little harder than necessary. Several minutes pass, she hears Jesus talking, people laughing, her sisters voice in the mix. "It's okay.", she stew, "I don't mind doing it by myself." Has this ever happened to you? I know this feeling that Martha is experiencing—we've got company coming, Taylor and I are rushing around, frantically vacuuming up crackers crumbs, and I dash downstairs with an armload of dirty laundry and see that my kids and strewn the bin of lego alllll over the floor. And I just swallow my annoyance. My sister-in-law calls this "being the grumpy martyr."

Finally, Martha is so irritated that she approaches Jesus, the person she knows Mary will emphatically listen to and she says, ""Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" That is some professional level passive aggression that Martha is using here. Jesus turns to Martha, with a tenderness and compassion in eyes for this dear friend who does not know how to slow down, how to stop doing things and says, ""Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has

chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

I'll confess to you all, I have always disliked this story. The reason being that I REALLY identify with Martha. There are things to be done- people need to eat. Wear clean clothes. There are dishes to be washed and floors to mopped, kids hair to brush. And it's zero fun to feel like you have to do those things all alone, to have no help. In the first century, I would 100% been a Martha, not a Mary. And what's so bad about being a Martha and caring for people's needs!? Compounding my irritation with this story, was when I would hear this story preached in the past, Jesus comes off as very insensitive, out of touch with his friend, Martha. Imagine Jesus sitting between mounds of dirty laundry and stacked up dishes, casually waving his hand saying, "Come on Martha, what's the big deal? It's just chores!" Or this story is preached with an underlying, casual sexism, that silly woman Mary, why is she so concerned with house stuff. Being with me is waaaay more important.

When I revisited this parable, trying to block out how other sermons had told the story, what emerged was a story about priorities, about societal pressure, and a tender hearted conversation between two friends about rest. Let's unpack some of that together.

First, the matter of priorities. More and more, I'm becoming aware that so many life decisions are questions of priorities, of determining what is essential for each person, each family or even each church. For my sister, putting her twin boys in daycare was

essential, so that she could continue doing a job that she loves and is really gifted at. Or I think of friends for whom living in Saskatoon is essential, so they purchase a smaller home, rather than buying a bigger home in Warman and having to commute. It's been said, "Yes, you can do anything, but you can't do everything at the same time." Or, more aptly, every yes to something means a no to something else. (or at least it should) We live in a culture that tells people, even tells churches that we should always be doing more. And there are so many good things, possibilities, opportunities that it's hard to resist that temptation to do one more thing.

Turning back to our text for this morning, notice that Jesus does not say to Martha that being hospitable and preparing generously for guest is a bad thing, or a thing of not value, but rather he gently turns her to this question of priorities. Is this essential? Is it worth getting angry with your sister over? Can you offer yourself some slack, some grace, and be where you want to be, rather than managing all the things? Jesus makes the point to Martha and to us that it is possible to be distracted by things that are good, things are valuable and important, but the trouble comes when the balance gets off-kilter, when the really good things sap our time and energy for the best things.

Relationships. Resting at the feet of Jesus. Grace for ourselves and for others.

I hear this message in my own life. Sometimes I get so caught up in doing things, all good things, I reason, that I get snippy with my kids or Taylor. I get anxious and frazzled with doing all the things that I fall into bed at night. I know this is not who I want to be as person, a partner, a parent, or a pastor. It should be made clear that everyone has

seasons that are busy, or seasons where we say, this feels like too much on my plate. Sometime we have no control over those things. Like in a season of illness, or transition. I felt this way last month with my course work, starting with Canadian Mennonite and the busy-ness of Advent and Christmas. These seasons happen, but what we as people and a church need to be cautious of is setting up our everyday life to be like-overflowing with things, even good things, to do.

Further, what's interesting about this exchange between Martha and Jesus is that Jesus is granting her permission to step outside the roles and expectations that society has placed on her. Martha was living the role that was given to her, expected by her society, and a role that she was probably good. Perhaps Martha even gained her sense of self-worth from doing things for others. And in Jesus' tender correction to Martha, he says to her, "Forget that. You have my permission to rest, to stop doing, and come be here in this room with me." The opinion that matters most is God's and God tells us, tenderly, that we don't have to live up to the norms and pressures that our culture puts on us, or even on our church. Sometimes we don't realize how deeply the norms and roles of our culture have shaped our imaginations, our understanding of what we think it means to be God's people.

In the fall of 2021, Christianity Today magazine put out a new, serial podcast entitled the Rise and Fall of Mars Hill. It chronicles the story of the Mars Hill Church in Seattle, and their controversial pastor, Mark Driscoll. At its height, Mars Hill had thousands of members across several campuses, and then the whole thing collapsed seemingly

overnight. It's a really well done podcast, I couldn't stop listening, and it became the number one religion podcast on apple podcasts. One thing that was striking about Mars Hill was it's growth mindset-church could always be done bigger and better. More members. More staff. More online views on their services. It was a toxic church culture steeped in the idea that more everything was always better. Staff felt very keenly that they were to sacrifice everything to the needs of the church, and specifically the asks of the lead pastor. And many did sacrifice their marriages, their friendships, their time, their health-physical and mental for this church. In one episode, a former staff member makes this observation, "We doubted that the word of God and work of the Spirit was enough for us as a church. We needed to do more. We needed to jazz it up. Better production, better website, more and more."

Culture tells us that more is better. That we are loved and valuable for what we produce. How much we can do. Yet, this is not the voice of Spirit which says that you are enough. You are beloved as you are. Lest we think that being productive and doing more is the best we have to offer God, Jesus tells us as he told Martha, I have something better for you. I have the best for you. I am the best for you.

What then is the cure for this pressure, both internal and external to do more? How do you answer Jesus' tender call for this? The answer is: rest. Resting our bodies, our minds, our hearts and our souls.

Jesus sets such an example for his followers in regards to rest in life and ministry. In "A

Theology of Rest: Sabbath principles for ministry”, Luisa Galleghar writes this, “Despite incredible healing and ministry opportunities, even Christ was faced with demands from family and crowds, and was impacted by stress and overwork. In Mark 6:31, Jesus and the disciples were so busy that “they did not even have a chance to eat.” Christ’s response, however, is instructive. Jesus told His disciples “come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31). Throughout His ministry, Jesus continually turns to a rhythm of God’s Sabbath rest, taking time for solitude and prayer. The Sabbath rest that Christ practiced pervaded His ministry and life, and offers ministry professionals (and I would say all followers of Jesus) a clear example to emulate.”

Rest is a gift, not a sign of failure. Rest is a calling, not a cop-out. Rest reminds us that we are more than what we produce, more than the sum of our accomplishments. In this new year, 2022, what might it look like in your life or the life of your household to pursue rest? What might it look like in the life of our church to pursue rest? How can we help one another to pursue this? Are we distracted by many things, even good things? Are we able accept our limitations with being creations, not Creator?

I’ve shared here before that resting is a challenge for me. I’ll share one way that I’m trying to build more rest into my life that was exemplified to me by another pastor. On Sunday’s, after church, this pastor couple would often invite people from church over for lunch. It was often a casual affair, not a big fancy plan, just, “Oh, why don’t you come over for lunch?” Taylor and I would go, and there would often be a few other people. We’d eat and chat for about an hour or so, at which point the pastor would stand up and

say, "Well, this has been wonderful. Feel free to stay as long as you like, but it's time for my nap." and off he would go. This happened consistently whenever we'd go there for lunch. This was his way of setting a boundary, of saying my ministry is important and so is rest for myself. It struck as odd the first time, but now I see the beauty of it, the courage, if you will, of welcoming rest, of allowing the world to keep turning, without you. So, I'm trying it. Every Sunday, I'm taking a nap. I'm putting a movie on for my kids. Putting my phone in another room, and napping. It's not a comprehensive theology of rest, but it's a start. What might your start be?

In closing friends, Jesus' tender call to us is to rest, to take a yoke that is easy and burden that is light. To rest in our belovedness as children, wholly and dearly loved, regardless of what we do (or don't do) in a given day. To be a church that walks in a path not of productivity and the endless pursuit of more, but the path of faithfulness and resting at the feet of Jesus. Amen.