

Mary and Martha July 25

Colossians 1:15-28

Luke 10:38-end

May the words

I am going to be asking a lot of questions this morning. I will give these out after the sermon so that you can ponder on them over the summer.

We enjoy entertaining, we had most of the family over last weekend for Becca's birthday, and a group of friends over for dinner on Wednesday. Tim will tell you that it was a lot of work getting the house cleaned and organised, setting up the table and getting everything ready to welcome people. We love having people round, but the preparation, not to mention the shopping and cooking, takes time. I am sure that I am not a perfect host, and I worry that I have forgotten things. There is a danger that we get so wrapped up in everything that needs to be done that we forget to enjoy the company of our guests. I have learnt over the years that there are more important things than everything being perfect in my eyes, that actually enjoying the company of the people we have invited is far more important. Getting everything right is my perspective on perfection; it is not necessarily my guests, who rarely notice if I have forgotten what I think is vital.

Jesus is coming to Martha's house, and Martha would have been doing all the things that Tim and I did to welcome our visitors. In fact, the account tells us that Jesus **and the disciples** were on their way. The disciples would have been with Jesus and would also have been welcomed into Martha's house, a large number of guests to accommodate for a meal. Martha must have had a big house, and it would have been a really great honour to welcome the famous teacher Jesus and his disciples into her home. Imagine welcoming Bishop Rose or a member of the royal family into your home. I would want everything to be perfect, and I would definitely be stressed, because I like everything to be just right. Notice the "I" in that sentence, **I** would like everything to be just right.

This story is often expounded to look at the balance between doing and being as Christians, but I want to unpick it differently this morning.

Martha would have been super busy preparing for the visit of the Jesus and his disciples, and I am sure that Mary would have helped her to prepare for the visit. The culture of the day was that women were expected to look after the house. However once Jesus arrived Martha continued to prepare the meal as would have been the expected norm in the culture, but Mary left all the things that needed doing and sat at

the feet of Jesus, going against the cultural norms of the day and behaving like a disciple, not a host.

Mary and Martha would have been familiar with the Torah, women could hear the Torah in the synagogue and might even have been able to listen to teachers expounding God, although girls would not have been taught by rabbis in their schools.

They recognised that Jesus was an important figure, even if they did not fully understand who Jesus was.

Women were expected to look after the house and care for people, and by so doing Martha was meeting the cultural norm of the day. In speaking to Jesus Martha assumed that Jesus would see the situation from her point of view. Assumptions can be dangerous, as the word says it can make an ass of you and me.

I want to ask you the first question. What is our attitude towards people who go against the accepted norms of the day today?

Mary did not do what Martha expected of her. Mary had different priorities, a different perspective. Mary wanted to spend time with Jesus' and get to know him better. When Martha sees things only from her own point of view, and expects Jesus to concur with her view, she says to Jesus, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?"

Did Jesus care that Mary had left her to do all the work? Jesus cared about Martha but gets to the heart of the matter when he identifies that Martha was worried and distracted by her concern to play the perfect hostess and losing her perspective on the situation. The choice that Martha made was not wrong, but she had lost sight of Jesus and who the work was for.

Are we in danger of being so concerned about being Christians in Aldington that we could lose sight of who we are serving? Do we need to take some time this summer to refocus on the God we serve, rather on the things that we do?

Martha was distracted by everything that she thought needed doing. Remember I said that it is my perception of what was important that needed to change when we had visitors. Martha wanted everything to be perfect for her guests, but for Martha that focus leads to her speaking and behaving in a way that could have spoiled the time she had with Jesus. Instead of asking Mary to help her she turns to Jesus and says, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? **Tell her then to help me**".

"Tell her then to help me".

Martha's attitude towards Mary spoiled her relationship with Jesus too. Martha was looking at things from her own point of view, she was not thinking about things from Jesus' point of view. If I had been invited to someone's house and when I arrived, they were too busy to spend time with me, how would that make me feel? She was also not looking at things from Mary's perspective, Mary was looking forward to spending time with Jesus and sat down to listen. Martha was looking at things from Martha's point of view.

"Tell her then to help me". Who did Martha think she was talking to?

Was it appropriate for Martha to speak to Jesus, who at the time was at least recognised as a great teacher, possibly a prophet, in that way? Was it frustration and stress, her desire for things to be done her way, that caused her to lose sight of the bigger picture and behave in that way? Was that how Martha always behaved, or did the situation bring out the worst in her?

Martha could not recognise that by listening to Jesus Mary had made a different choice. It was not just Mary's choice to listen to Jesus, but her choice to go against the accepted norms of the day, by sitting at his feet and acting as a disciple would have done.

What brings out the worst in us?

Whilst Martha did not fully understand who Jesus was, it was because he was a well-known and respected teacher that he had been invited to her house, and the way in which she demands that he tell Mary to help her presumes a relationship that was not the relationship of a teacher and guest.

Do we see everything only from our own point of view? Do we look at others and make judgements based on our own preferences and ideas? Are **we** in danger of treating Jesus as a familiar friend rather than the Saviour who is the Son of God?

We sang Indescribable which praises God the creator:

From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea Creation's revealing Your majesty. From the colours of fall to the fragrance of spring Every creature unique in the song that it sings. All exclaiming

Indescribable, uncontainable You placed the stars in the sky And You know them by name. You are amazing, God

All powerful, untameable, Awestruck we fall to our knees As we humbly proclaim You are amazing, God.

Our reading from Colossians tells us that “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him”.

As evangelical Christians we can be in danger of bringing God down to our level and forgetting how awesome God is, who God is. Do we tell God what to do? Or do we sit, listen and learn at the feet of Jesus?

There is a balance to be had in life, we cannot spend all day reading our Bibles, praying, and spending time with Jesus, we have responsibilities and homes to look after, but when we do spend time with God, we need to remember who it is that we are talking to. **Our** perspective on a person, a situation, on what should happen may not be God’s perspective, we cannot and should not tell God what to do.

When Jesus speaks, he gets to the underlying reason of Martha’s sharp words, showing his understanding of the human psyche, demonstrating compassion and using his wisdom in getting to the heart of the matter. Maybe Martha was a person that could only see things from her own point of view, but in my experience frustration and stress can make people behave in ways that they would not normally do. As followers of Jesus understanding that, and having a compassionate and forgiving attitude, can build fellowship and community, both in our churches and in our communities.

Understanding the things that make **us** stressed and anxious is really important in helping us to get the balance right in our own lives. Once we recognise those things in ourselves, we can start to look at others and understand that situations, people, and circumstances can make people behave in ways that they may not do in normal situations. Long term stress and anxiety can bury who people really are and it will take time to dig out the real person. Do we look at people with the compassion and understanding that Jesus shows?

Are we so busy that we forget to enjoy having Jesus in our lives?

Do we think that we know what Jesus wants, and single mindedly follow a blinkered path that keeps us from seeing what is important?

Is our attitude towards other people spoiling our relationship with Jesus too?

Do we know what brings out the worst in us, so that we can try and make sure that we do not allow those people or situations to get in the way of our relationship with Jesus?

Is there an attitude or anything in our lives which is spoiling our relationship with Jesus?

Do we bring God down to our level, and forget who God really is?

Do we forget to look at things from the perspective of other people? Knowing and understanding how people can be affected by stress can help us to be more like Jesus in our attitude towards people.

Do we get caught up in cultural norms in our own lives? Meeting Jesus, getting to know Jesus, coming to church and worshipping Jesus is no longer the cultural norm in our country. Just by being here we are breaking the cultural norms of our day.

How can we better look at people with the understanding, wisdom and compassion of Jesus?

How can we ensure that we give God the time that we need to so that we can get to know Him better?

Over the summer let us ponder on this story, and our part in it. Have we got the balance right between being a Martha and a Mary? Indescribable finishes with these words: Incomparable, unchangeable, You see the depths of my heart, And You love me the same, You are amazing, God, You are amazing, God.

Amen.