

**Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena**

July 18, 2010

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰But 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." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

“Intentionality”

We were working on an issue together. One of the things we needed to do was send an email to those where principally involved in the situation. It was one of those situations that was about as intricate and involved as can be. There were many different perspectives which could come into play.

My colleague and I had discussed the issues at length and had concluded that what was really needed was some hard work by a larger group of people. We concluded that it was one of those times where more circles of influence should be brought to play in thinking openly, critically, and spiritually about the situation at hand. We concluded that what was really needed was some honest calling on God for direction; we concluded that discernment was the order of the day.

It was also our view that some things should not be reacted to immediately. While there are many situations that demand immediate response, some very critical issues are best served by taking some

deliberate time to ruminate with the Holy Spirit and each other about ultimate directions.

We needed a short, concise, and clear way of stating that in our email to those involved. We were careful with our word choices and did not want to describe the situation with words that were judgmental in tone. We did not want to say that there was an issue or there was a problem. We did not want to refer to difficulties or challenges. Those words just were not quite it.

Then, in a stroke of genius, my friend said, “The word my daughter uses is ‘unsettled.’ ‘Things are unsettled.’” It was the perfect word. It was even the apt phrasings: “Things appear to be unsettled at this time...” It said it without casting a judgment one way or another on it. It made it into an observation rather than a criticism. It was more of a neutral term.

Long after the email was sent, that word has been tumbling around in my mind and has made its way to my reality this week. “Unsettled.” We live in an unsettled time. We exist in an unsettled place. We find the direction of our lives—well, we find it unsettling. It is an age of unsettled existence.

Unsettled. Often our thoughts are unsettled. Our longings are unsettled. Our families are unsettled. Our relationships are unsettled. Our futures are unsettled—as are our churches and neighborhoods and jobs and finances and, and, and.... There is this unsettledness that reigns in the age of technological advancement.

“Life just happens.” “Life just happens to you,” another friend of mine is quick to say. The sentiment and feeling behind it are apparent. Stuff just happens and we have little to no control over it. Stuff just happens to us and we are receivers where one thing after another is flung

at us and we just duck and bob and weave hoping to miss some of the flaming arrows.

Ah...life unsettled. Stuff happens!

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I rant and rave in the face of such a view of life and the world. While I think there is some truth in the stuff happens view of life—I do not accept that such is the way things are. I believe there is more to the story and there is more to life too. Uncontrollable things do come our way all the time, but we need not be those sitting ducks just waiting for the next flaming arrow.

Some of life is out of our control—in those moments it is what we make of it that counts. Much more of our life than what we usually factor is in our grasp. We tend not to have much grasp on what happens—we just let life happen. We just meander through and what comes along comes along and we go with it making the best we can—and the best we can usually means we end up—yes—we end up “unsettled.”

It is unintentional. We just sort of land here. We just sort of ended up here at this point in life.

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There is an alternative. It has to do with this story from Luke’s Gospel and it has to do with the word “intentional.” I believe that what Jesus is teaching Mary and Martha and us too is about the issue of “intentionality.”

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As the story goes, Jesus is at the home of Martha and Mary. Luke tells us nothing about these two sisters others than in these few verses.

We know a little bit more about them from the Gospel of John where we meet them on the occasion of the death and raising of their brother Lazarus. Martha is the one who meets Jesus while he is still on the road. Mary is the one who is waiting for him at the house. Both of them see Jesus call for their dead brother to come from his tomb—and he does just that alive, and well, and restored.

Here in Luke’s Gospel Jesus is with the two sisters in their home. He is there for a dinner. It is not clear whether the dinner party includes more than the three of them. Regardless of this, the incident happens between the three of them. We know this old story well enough to know how the scene is set. Jesus and Mary are in the living room. Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to his teachings. Mary is seated in the position of a disciple. It is the classic position of a learning disciple.

While there is this wonderful scene of Mary learning from Jesus in one room, from the other room one can hear Martha rustling around with the dishes in the kitchen. The longer she is there the more aggravated she gets. She is trying to do what she is supposed to do. She is trying to be hospitable to her guest.

Do not read the 1950’s into the scene. This is not about her doing woman’s work of preparing meals and handling kitchen issues. That is not point. Where it becomes telling is when she appears in the living room in a state of protest. She does not just address her sister. She pulls Jesus into the matter. You can almost hear the anger in her voice—“I’m in the kitchen doing all the work while she is in here. I’m left alone to handle all the preparations. It is not fair. Tell her to pull her load and do her part of the work that she should be doing.”

Jesus does not get pulled into the matter in the way Martha hopes. He does not take her side. He does not take a side period. What he tells

her is that Mary has chosen the better part. A better translation would be that Mary has chosen the good part.

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There is a way to read this story that Martha is active and Mary is learning. It becomes a dichotomy of action over intellect. While that is a way to read the story I think it misses the point that Jesus wants to make with Martha. It is not that study and learning are preferred over action. Faithfulness involves both learning and doing. Faith is more than a noun it is also a verb—it is active—it involves both sitting at the feet of Jesus and attending to the needs of others.

The real issue is seen in the unsettled nature of Martha. In the story she is about as unsettled as can be while Mary is settled. Mary is not only settled she is intentional. She has made an intentional choice. Mary's intentional choice is to be taking in this moment when Jesus is there and learn all she can from him.

Martha has made no intentional choices—she has just gone on with the flow of how things happen. She has been the unintentional victim of “life happens.” And the unsettledness of that comes out in the clear hostility she demonstrates towards her sister. Hey, we always demonstrate our deepest frustrations on those closest to us.

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You see, the intentional choice that Mary has made is this is all about Jesus. The unintentional choice that Martha has made is that this is all about Martha. Martha has been wronged by her neglectful sister.

It has to do with the issue of intentionality. “The better part,” the good part, as Jesus puts it has to do with when we make an intentional

choice rather than just letting life happen. Letting things just fall where they may is what results in that unsettled living.

Intentionality. It—life, focus, drive, momentum, progress, tomorrow, quality today, meaning, forward—it has to do with living with intentionality.

Intentionality has active choice. Active choice. We can make active choices in our living. We can make active choices in our living or we can just let things fall where they may be. I see in the Christian life this call to active decision and active choice. It is a constant call and constant deciding that must be done over and over and over again each day.

The words of Jesus to his disciples are clear: “Follow me.” We are told that James and John left their nets and followed. They made an active choice. They did not just let life happen they made an active choice—it was an intentional choice.

Intentionality has substance. There is substance to intentional choice and intentional living. That substance—oh, Mary sat there at his feet—she sat there taking in all that she could. She got it that this moment was not about her but it was about him—this moment was not about her it was about Jesus.

That is the substance of intentional living. That we get it that this moment—even right now—it is not about us but about God. What is God doing in my life? What does God want for me now? How does God want me to act? What does God want me to do, or think, or be right now?

It is about God and not about me. When we intentionally make that choice to ask: “Where is God in this and how do I put God’s call in my life first here?” When we intentionally make that choice to ask that—we are living intentionally.

It is the cross. That was an intentional choice that Jesus made. It might have appeared that it was part of the stuff happens of his life—but he made an intentional choice. In making that choice we see the result. We see that God answers it all in resurrection and life.

We see that as we face whatever we face on this side of the equation the result will be that God will bring life out of it—ultimately. God is at work—even in our unsettledness—God is at work to bring about life for us with an intentionality that invites us to actively make choices.

It is the role of prayer. Prayer is not a coming before God and begging for what we really want. Usually we use prayer as sort of a candy store and parent approach. We come into the candy store and we beg for this goodie and for that one. Please, please, please...can I have that or can I have that...please, please, please.

Prayer is deeper than that—it is about intention—it is about those moments and about expanding those moments when our intention is for God. Prayer is about God being our intention and our intentionality.

Pray with intention.

Live with intentionality. Amen.