

Sunday Worship for 22 March 2020

First Sunday after Trinity



Introduction

Good morning church, and it is a pleasure to be leading this service along with you today. Although it feels weird doesn't it? This week has been a hard one in lockdown, we have said goodbye to some very special people recently with the loss of Tom here, and Reg at All Saints. Both people who I would think of as the Grandfathers of our churches. Both people were great story tellers and I wonder what they would think of today's readings that focus in on Mary and Martha? When we read them who do we identify with most? I look forward to reading Paul Clayton's sermon on this and reflecting on what its lessons are for my life.

Though we cannot come together physically, we gather spiritually as the family of God in our Father's presence to offer him praise and thanksgiving, to hear and receive his holy word, to bring before him the needs of the world, to ask forgiveness for our sins and to seek his grace, that, through his son Jesus Christ we may give ourselves for his service.

Hymn: Be Still for the presence of the Lord

**Be still for the presence of the Lord
The holy one is here
Come bow before him now
With reverence and fear
In him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord
The holy one is here**

**Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire
With splendour he is crowned
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant king of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around**

**Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal
To minister his grace
No work too hard for him
In faith receive from him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place.**

Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: The first commandment is this: 'The Lord your God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

**Lord of all life, we use thousands of words each day
yet so few of them are about you – forgive us.
We busy ourselves in so much activity
that we blank out the silence within – forgive us.
Help us to re-tune our lives to the solemn music of your beckoning presence.
Amen**

May the Lord enrich us with his grace, and nourish us with his blessing;
May he defend us in trouble and keep us from all evil;
May he accept our prayers and absolve us from our offences,
For the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. **Amen.**

Readings

Luke 10: 38-42

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one.^[f] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

John 11: 1-32

11 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

⁶ So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

⁸ "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

¹² His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

¹⁶ Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

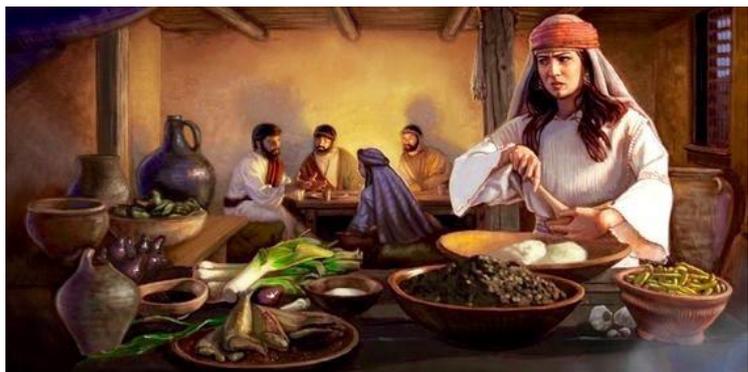
This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

[Sermon \(by Paul Clayton\)](#)

This morning we are in the second part of our four part series on "Women in the Bible". Today we are looking at Martha, someone who lived in the time of Jesus. However, when we talk about Martha it is important to also look at her sister Mary to see a contrast in how they lived their lives.

I would like to begin by looking at the passage from Luke's gospel. It has been suggested by learned biblical scholars, that Luke intended this little cameo on hospitality to be read straight after the parable of the "Good Samaritan" to reinforce its message. The passage tells us that Martha opened her home to Jesus, that she had a sister called Mary, but Luke's gospel does not mention she also had a brother called Lazarus, who was the one Jesus brought back to life. We will look at that incident later when we look at our reading from John's gospel.



Most scholars believe Martha was older than her brother and sister, in the fact Luke describes her as someone who is the host and in charge of the hospitality, Luke also says, it was Martha's home that was the setting for our reading. However, in these few short verses we see contrasting behaviour between the two sisters. Martha was busy and distracted by all the preparations she had made, truly a serving role; whereas Mary just sat at the feet of Jesus, listening to him, truly an act of worship.

I remember a discussion I had some years ago about which is the more important, service or worship. The Scriptures ask us to serve God and also to worship him, As Christians we are servants of Jesus and in our prayers and meditation we worship him. However, ideally it's about getting a true balance and we can only get that if we allow the Holy Spirit to direct our lives.

Charles Spurgeon the great Baptist preacher, when in conversation with one of his students was told, "Doctor Spurgeon, I spend eight hours a day in prayer and meditation is that commendable?" Spurgeon replied, "Yes, but there is a time to get off your knees and get on to your feet."

Very sound advice from the great preacher, something we can all learn from.

So how do we apportion our time as disciples of Jesus? Do we follow Martha's example, consumed by detail and getting the tasks of our service right, or like Mary constantly in worship at the feet of Jesus?. There is no

right answer, as I mentioned earlier it's about getting the balance. If we look at the last words Jesus said to his disciples on earth, from Matthew 28: 16 - 20:

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This portion of Scripture called, "The Great Commission", is a call to service for all disciples, including us today. It's interesting to note that when the disciples saw Jesus they worshipped him. There are less than a handful of occasions in the Scriptures where we see the disciples as a group worshipping Jesus. In fact, although worship was a major factor in the Old Testament, amongst the Jewish people, very little is mentioned in the New Testament about practices and procedures of worship. But we know in our hearts as believers, that with Jesus, someone we love and serve, we want to worship Him.

We walk past a church, that may say "Morning Service" or equally it may say, "Morning Worship". What is more intriguing, in the Greek Lexicon, the words for worship and service are next to each other;

- Latreia - Worship - Pay Homage
- Latreuo - Service - Render Service

This summarises perfectly what we feel our act of worship should be. In the King James Bible, when Paul, in Romans 12:1 asks us to present our bodies as, "living sacrifices," he says, "which is your reasonable service." Whereas, in a modern translation, the NIV, it says, "this is your spiritual act of worship". Throughout the New Testament Scriptures the two words appear to be interchangeable, almost meaning the same thing. A text on a church notice board summed it up.

We worship him as we serve him, and serve him as we worship

So in our acts of service do we, like Martha, get distracted by the detail and spend too much time pursuing certain tasks? Sometimes when we do this our Christianity can become religious dogma. Or are we like Mary, constantly at the foot of Jesus and not involved in acts of service? (Yes, there are people who are constantly in prayer and meditation and spend their lives in that situation.)

I remember as a young Christian attending a weekly prayer meeting followed by a sermon. One evening we had a visiting speaker, the emphasis in our prayer time that evening had been to have more people in our community come into the church. After the prayers the visiting speaker got up and said how much he had admired our resolve and fervour to bring new people into the church. He then went on to ask if anybody had knocked on the doors in our community and invited people to come to church. For a short period there was silence, one of those tumbleweed moments.



In our reading from John's gospel we read of Lazarus' illness and subsequent death. Martha and Mary had sent word to Jesus about Lazarus being very sick, "Lord the one you love is sick." However, we read Jesus did not come straight away, and when he did come, Lazarus had died and been in the tomb for four days. Now we see more of the character of Martha and what we can learn from her to help in our Christian lives. We read Martha goes out to meet Jesus, as was the custom for the head of a household to go and meet guests along the way, but Mary stayed at home. We can only guess as to why. After two thousand years most Bible commentaries suggest that Mary was still locked in her grief.

Whatever the reason we now see Martha and Jesus in a sort of theological discussion. It's important we read the dialogue directly from Scripture to see the way the discussion was shaping;

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

We see Martha's strong faith, a blind faith in her belief that God would give Jesus whatever he asked. She also believed in the power Jesus had, if he had come earlier, to heal her brother's sickness. Jesus' response to her unquestioning faith was enigmatic when he said to her,

"Your brother will rise again."

"Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Mary had, what could be described as, a traditional view of resurrection, one that had been developed in the previous two hundred years by the pharisees and other teachers of law.

Then Jesus spoke some of the most powerful words in the whole of Scripture;

"I am the resurrection and the life, He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

I have conducted over a hundred funerals and have said these words at every one of them. Each time I say them, I have this great sense of hope. Jesus in conquering death became the cornerstone of life, eternal life. Martha had a sense of disappointment and a sense of hope, the resurrection was far from her mind at the moment. She believed she would see her brother again on the last day, but could she believe her brother, already in the tomb with the stone placed, could be soon alive and enjoying her hospitality.

After Jesus spoke those powerful words, previously mentioned he then said to Martha, "Do you believe this?"

Martha replies, "Yes Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who was to come in to the world."

Wonderful words, a kind of response to John 3: 16. Martha's declaration of faith is the first thing God requires from us if we are to be a disciple of Jesus. For all Martha's attention to detail and becoming obsessed with the task, here was a woman with a powerful faith.

Martha went back for Mary and said Jesus wanted to see her. What he was going to do next was for both the sisters he loved. It's interesting, when Mary met Jesus, she fell at his feet, the two sisters together had the combined characteristics of the perfect Christian, but there are no perfect Christians are there?

Our reading ends here but we do know that Jesus went with the sisters to the tomb of Lazarus and Jesus brought him back to life. We read that many who were with Martha and Mary put their faith in Jesus.

I believe that Martha and Mary were already devoted believers, Christians if you like, even before their beloved brother was brought back from the dead. They did not need the miracle that Jesus was about to show them.

Was the relationship Jesus had with Mary different from his relationship with Martha? I don't think so, because the overriding factor is in John 11: 5;

"Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."

Knowing that Jesus loves us as individuals and that love is the same for everyone, a love that knows no bounds, brings a sense of oneness to all believers.

Every church needs a mixture of Martha and Mary characteristics. In fact when Paul talks about Gifts of the Spirit, he mentions practical gifts and spiritual gifts. St Mary's is entering a time of change, not just the interregnum, but what will things be like after Coronavirus? We must be prepared to allow God to direct our individual ministries as the situation develops.

I found a poem relating to Martha and Mary, not a classic or from the romantic era. But a poem, more likely to be found on tea towels or fridge magnets, It's by a lady called Klara Munkres, a retired schoolteacher (1879 - 1971). It's called: The Kitchen Prayer

Lord of all pots and pans and things
Since I've not time to be
A saint by doing lovely things
Watching late with thee
Or dreaming in the dawn light or
Storming Heavens gates
Make me a saint by getting meals and
Washing up the plates.
Although I must have Martha's hands,
I have a Mary mind
And when I black the boots and shoes,
Thy sandals Lord I find,
I think of how they trod the earth,
Each time I scrub the Floor
Accept this meditation Lord,
I haven't time for more

Martha was a true servant of Jesus, how much more evidence do we need to say like Martha;
"Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God"

Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers (written by Brian Settle)

Father God, as we sit in your presence and with these sheets of paper in front of us, that have been lovingly made into our service of worship today. We choose to Step aside from ourselves to prayer for the needs of others in your hurting world. Lord we pray for those whose lives are filled with fear; their lives are damaged by war, famine, neglect and abuse, these people are overwhelmed by their sense of insecurity in an insecure world. They have lost all purpose in life, no reason to live, it's too much for them to think of a better world. Oh God, they need the strength of Christ.

'may the grace of Christ be enough for all their needs'

THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYER, THANKS BE TO GOD

In our world today Father, we pray for those who are filled with darkness and emptiness; for those facing a time of great frustration and unanswered questions. Why me they cry!! They are overwhelmed with the pressures of living; the demands of home and work, they struggle to cope with the needs of their families or they face life ahead on their own, without a companion, a soul mate or a partner.

'may the grace of Christ bring them peace'

THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYER, THANKS BE TO GOD

Heavenly Father we pray for those who are struggling with their disabilities; in our communities we accept the healthy and the young and disregard others who may not fit in to our own patterns of acceptance. We pray against our culture of prejudice and indifference, we lift up everyone who may feel excluded by their colour or their race, by their age or their gender, and we remember before you Almighty God all those whose poverty, homelessness or lack of employment keeps them locked out of our society, their society.

'may the grace of Christ give them hope'

THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYER, THANKS BE TO GOD

We pray for all in positions of great responsibility and for those who care for others. For the leaders of nations and of governments, leaders in industry and unions, leaders in our health care systems and for those who work in the media. We remember in our prayers the parents concerned for their children and their future. We pray for all teachers and those responsible for the young children in their daily care. We pray for all Christians in these walks of life, who long to lead them to Christ and we pray they will be allowed to do so.

'may the grace of Christ guide and bless them'

THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYER, THANKS BE TO GOD

In our broken world, we pray for the broken hearted, whose lives are ruined by addiction. For those who have lost their homes and possessions through their own foolishness or through natural disasters and man-made wars. We pray for those whose lives are in danger through overeating or who are starving to death, for those who are sad, lonely or alone, for those facing rejection and disillusionment and all for whom the 'bottom' has dropped out of their world for whatever reason.

'May the grace of Christ continue to hold them'

THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYER, THANKS BE TO GOD

We pray for those who are sick or in hospital and for those who will never recover this side of glory. We lift all those who are dying and for those who wait with them. We pray for the depressed, anxious and afraid; people that we know in our neighbourhoods and families. We lift up all those with seemingly big problems and feel they have no one to share these things with.

May the grace of Christ give them strength

THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYER, THANKS BE TO GOD

Finally, we pray for ourselves and the pressures and trials we face in our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask Father for courage in times when our integrity is challenged and our faith fullness is put to the test. Those times when we are tempted to compromise and even to deny what we believe. Remind us dear Lord that we are not standing alone, that you are with us and we have each other to share our burdens, fears, hopes and dreams.

'May the grace of Christ help us to stand'

THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYER, THANKS BE TO GOD

WE ASK ALL THESE PRAYERS IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZERETH, AMEN

Collect for the day

**God of truth,
help us to keep your law of love
and to walk in ways of wisdom,
that we may find true life
in Jesus Christ your Son.**

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen**

Song: There is a Redeemer

**There is a Redeemer,
Jesus, God's own Son,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.**

***Thank You, O my Father,
for giving us Your Son,
and leaving Your Spirit
till the work on earth is done.***

**Jesus, my Redeemer,
name above all names,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,**

**O for sinners slain:
*Thank You, O my Father,
for giving us Your Son,
and leaving Your Spirit
till the work on earth is done.***

**When I stand in glory
I will see His face,
and there I'll serve my King for ever**

**in that holy place.
Thank You, O my Father,
for giving us Your Son,
and leaving Your Spirit
till the work on earth is done.**

The Peace

At this point, we would normally share God's peace with each other. We cannot do that physically but please spend a few minutes now praying for specific people at St. Mary's...

The Grace

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God,
and the fellowship
of the Holy Spirit
be with us evermore. Amen**