

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 11
Year C

Genesis 18:1-10a
Psalm 15
Colossians 1:15-28
Luke 10:38-42

In the Gospel readings from last week and today, we find Jesus instructing us in discipleship through two very different stories.

Last week, we had the story of Jesus' interaction with the lawyer about who is our neighbor, with the telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan. In that reading, Jesus focused on two aspects of our relationships with others. First, we must see what is really happening in the world around us. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side probably thinking the man in the ditch was dead and they did not want to defile themselves by touching a dead body. Their seeing was defective. The Samaritan man, on the other hand, looked with compassion on the man in the ditch and went to render aid.

The second aspect of the story with the lawyer was action - go and do likewise. We are to act on what we see, not turning a blind eye to the situation, but acting on what we have observed. In other words, Christianity is not a passive religion but one that requires us to be involved in the world around us.

In today's reading, we see Jesus entering the home of Martha and Mary. While Jesus settles in and begins talking with those who are gathered there, Martha is busy doing what she always did - she was preparing the meal, showing good hospitality. We can see a reflection in her activities of the similar hospitality shown to the visitors by Abraham and Sarah in our reading from Genesis. This is what was expected of any host.

Meanwhile, her sister Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to all He had to say. She was doing what any disciple would do. However, in their culture, it was not common for a woman to be a disciple in this manner. Men were the ones gathered at the feet of the master, while women were in the background.

Much has been written about the actions of these two women. Martha has been compared to those whose discipleship is expressed through doing good work - feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick. These are all necessary aspects of discipleship. Likewise, Mary has been compared to those who follow a contemplative journey of discipleship - praying and studying scripture. In Acts, we see both of these ministries promoted. So, why does Jesus tell Martha that Mary has chosen the better part?

While Jesus explained to the lawyer that we need to focus on seeing and doing, there is more to discipleship than this. We must also spend time listening. The better part that Mary had chosen was to sit quietly and listen to what Jesus taught. Listening is one of the ways we learn, along

with reading and observing. Too often, we forget to stop and listen to God. We are so busy with our own agendas, we join Martha in trying to tell God what God should do, not sitting and listening to what God is trying to tell us. Martha was so distracted by her efforts to put together the perfect meal, to show the best hospitality to this man she called Lord, that she began telling Jesus what to do. Thus, Jesus quietly settled her down and urged her to join her sister.

Often, I find myself praying to God with a long list of wants - heal this person, give me inspiration, watch over the travelers, and the list goes on. What I fail to do, and I'm sure I am not alone in this, is to stop talking and start listening. I don't give God a chance to get a word in. Jesus is telling us that, while seeing and acting are good, we also need to take time out to listen to God. That is the better part Jesus was commending Mary for taking and that is the message God is trying to get through to us today.

Go and do, yes - but also stop and listen once in a while.