

Season After Pentecost [Proper 11] - Year C

July 20/21, 2013

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: Genesis 18: 1-10a; Psalm 15; Luke 10: 38-42

Distracted and Dangerous

There is a modern day tale told about Satan instructing his followers in the way to win souls from God. It's a bit like an updated chapter from The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis in which a Master Demon instructs his apprentice. It goes something like this:

Satan called a worldwide convention. In his opening address to his evil angels, he said, "We can't keep the Christians from going to church. We can't keep them from reading their Bibles and knowing the truth. We can't even keep them from forming an intimate, abiding relationship experience in Christ. But If they become convinced that their connection with Jesus is the most important thing, our power over them is broken. So let them go to church, let them claim their Christian lifestyles, but steal their time, so they can't gain that experience in Jesus Christ. This is what I want you to do, demons. Distract them from the love and presence of their Savior throughout their day! It will cut them off from their source of strength and meaning. Keep them distracted"

"How shall we do this?" shouted his angels.

"Keep them busy in the nonessentials of life and invent innumerable schemes to occupy their minds, "he answered. "Tempt them to spend, spend, spend, and borrow, borrow, borrow to create a lifestyle they can't afford. Persuade them to work for long hours, to work 6 - 7 days a week, 10 - 12 hours a day, so they can keep up with their lifestyles. Keep them from spending time with their children and spouses. As their family fragments, soon, their home will offer no escape from the pressures of work."

"Over stimulate their minds so that they cannot hear that still small voice. Entice them to play the radio, CD or MP3 player whenever they drive. To keep the TV, music and their computers going constantly in their homes. And see to it that every store and restaurant in the world plays music constantly. This will jam their minds, "

Pound their minds with the news 24 hours a day. Have ads and information pop up constantly on their computers and phones. Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, sweepstakes, mail order catalogues, and every kind of newsletter and promotional offering free products, services, and false hopes."

"Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from their vacations and weekends exhausted, disquieted, and unprepared for the coming week. Don't let them go out in nature to reflect on God's wonders. Convince them that fun can only be found at amusement parks, sporting events, inane movies, extreme sports — things that are costly, flood them with stimuli and make them adrenalin junkies."

“And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotion. Let them be involved in soul-winning. But crowd their lives with so many good causes they have no time to seek power from Christ. Soon they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing their health and family for the good of the cause."

It was quite a convention in the end. And the demons went eagerly to their assignments enticing Christians everywhere to get busy, busy, busy and worry, worry, worry and be distracted by many things. ¹

“Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things,” Jesus says with great concern and care for her. Martha invited Jesus and his followers into her home. She has gotten

quite wrapped up in attending to the details of hospitality. All the while she is working herself up into a righteous snit about her sister who sits listening to their guest, learning from this man sent by God. So distracted by her building resentment, Martha takes a verbal swing at Jesus, “Don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?” *And* tells the Lord what he should do. “Tell her then to help me.” Can’t you just hear the silence in the room. See the heads dipping down in embarrassment? What is the tone you hear in Jesus’s voice when he answers? I don’t hear meanness or disgust. I hear a kindness, gentleness and bit of sadness as he invites her to return to the love and faith that has grown between them, the life-giving relationship that was perhaps the reason for her desire to provide him hospitality in the first place. We understand that kind of frantic distraction, don’t we?

Today’s gospel is not pitting Martha “doers” against Mary “contemplatives” or service against word and worship. Instead it is revealing the importance and need of both. I had never notice before that this story is sandwiched between the parable of the Good Samaritan (last week’s gospel) and Jesus teaching his disciples to pray (next week’s gospel.) This story of Jesus visiting with Martha and Mary comes right after a parable about someone stopping along the road to help a person in need, Jesus saying “Go and do likewise.” It will be followed by the picture of Jesus praying and his disciples ask, “Lord, teach us to pray.”² It’s not Martha *or* Mary. Works *or* Bible Study. Activity *or* quiet devotional time. It’s both. **If** our hospitality, filling Micah’s backpacks, helping at VBS, being kind to our neighbor, bringing a meal to a funeral luncheon becomes disconnected from Jesus, we find resentment and weariness replacing our sense of meaningful purpose and compassion. When we are disconnected from God by our distractions, we grumble, mutter about “other people” who don’t do anything, and make ourselves and those around us uneasy, if not down right miserable. Disconnected from the love

and power of Jesus we are relying on ourselves alone ---- and wonder why we are tired, disillusioned and empty.

Jesus did not scold Martha. Jesus pointed out the demon distraction that was sucking the life and joy out of her heart and spirit. Amid her dutiful labors and responsibilities, Martha lost something essential — herself, valued and loved not because of what she does but because of who she was, the beloved child of God. If we were permitted to remain a bit further in the gospel story, I imagine Jesus then invited Martha to sit down with him to breathe in the cleansing, renewing breath of grace.

I will not scold you or I either. But I will point out that we are a busy people. “[Our culture] regularly tells us that our worth stems not from our status as God’s beloved children or even as human beings but from what we *have*, from what we *own*, from what we *do*. In such an environment, we need more than ever the opportunity to hear that while much of our doing is important, there is a more needful thing: to hear from Jesus that we are loved, even treasured, for who we are, regardless of what we do.”³ That why many of us are here today — knowingly or not. That is why we want others to be here, too. We need to be “refreshed and renewed by God’s word [and meal] of mercy grace, and love,”⁴ to hear again that we are loved.

Linda M Alessandri 7/19/2013

ENDNOTES

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1. Illustration posted on www.sermons.com by Ray Osborne from "Here's Mud in Your Eye!"
 2. **Error! Main Document Only.Error! Main Document Only.**Grateful to Alyce McKenzie for this insight as related in her blog "Clearing Away the Psychic Clutter: Martha and Mary in Luke 10: 38-42" posted on July 12, 2010.
 3. Adapted from David Lose's notes on the text, "Mary, Martha and the Search for a More Useful Faith" as posted July15, 2013 on www.workingpreacher.org
 4. Lose, "Mary, Martha and the Search fro a More Useful Faith"