

The Boo of Christ
Luke 10:38-42
Sermon by Mag Richer Smith
January 14, 2018

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

At the beginning of Advent, I was walking with our 2 year old grandchildren in Pittsburgh. And when we came to a nativity scene in a neighbor's yard, they both commented that there was no baby Jesus there.

Where is he? they wanted to know.

I tried to explain that it's Advent and we are waiting to celebrate Jesus' birth on Christmas.

But Where is he right now?

Well, (I scrambled) he's in his mother Mary and soon there will be a birth.

And is he in you, too, Grandma?

And is he in me? And in Mama and in Papa?

Is Jesus hiding, waiting to pop out and say "BOO!"?

"Well, Yes!" I replied, stunned by the simplicity and profundity of their awareness.

Jesus IS hiding in us, waiting to pop out and say BOO!
To surprise us and alert us &
help us see where he is waiting to be found.

When Your Spiritual Life Team met with Bob and I to
determine whether or not we might be a good fit for your
interim pastors, we were asked what we would do with a
congregation who is grieving.

And immediately our response was LISTEN.

So it seems a bit presumptuous to SPEAK to you today when
we have not had sufficient time to hear your stories,
learn about the places you struggle,
the hopes you entertain...
and the yearnings in your hearts.

But what we do know is that Jesus is here among us,
residing in the living rooms of each of our souls...
wanting to teach us and reach us and call us to attention,
so that we can discover more about what
(loving like Jesus loves) looks like here and here and here.

IN our story today, Jesus arrives at Martha's House and is
welcomed with a wide embrace, offered a glass of wine
and a chair by the fire, and then Martha quickly excuses
herself to the kitchen where a large "to do" list is looming.

Jesus has rattled her by arriving earlier than expected, and
Martha (who has been running behind anyway),
is ringing her hands about all that has not yet been
accomplished, even as she smiles this welcome to Jesus.

Jesus (in the meantime) is greeted differently by Mary, who sits with him & invites him to share what's weighing on his heart. How's your day been, Jesus?

But Martha who wants to give Jesus her very best, lets herself get distracted by the tasks. There are so many and she wants to do well, and she is afraid it might not be good enough. Martha is under pressure to produce and prove her competence. She had counted on four hands and now there are only two and those two are sore from all the hand wringing! So when her sister is just sitting there doing nothing, Martha is bursting with frustration. And assuming that Jesus can see what's wrong with this picture, Martha says,

"Mary will listen to you, JESUS. Tell her to come and help, so I can get dinner on the table"

Jesus shocks Martha with his response:

"Mary IS listening to me and that's what's most important.

"You have gotten distracted by your many tasks and lost sight of what is MOST NEEDED."

LISTENING to one another, (even when our agenda looms large and the work before us is immense).... is the one thing necessary.

It could be we know Martha quite well when our pre-occupying tasks keep us from attending to :

the child pulling on our leg

the caller who interrupts our work
the victims whose plights flood the news
the friends walking through difficult times,
the spouse whose deeper needs get buried under the pile
that needs to get done right now.

Listening takes time, curiosity and availability.
And it can be transformative when we listen to one another
across our differences , find a point of connection and
realize that Jesus IS in the living room of the other.

A pacifist theologian was in a heated debate with another
articulate theologian over the “Just War Theory,” and as the
morning progressed, so did the intensity of their discussion,
until both of these red-faced men were not only at odds
over an issue but also with each other.

BUT...then over lunch they discovered that they were both
fathers whose children struggled with severe
disabilities...and their Hearts were disarmed, their pointed
fingers at “YOU” became an embrace of “US.”

And Jesus was saying in that common ground,

“HERE I AM..” LISTEN!

Just this week I heard someone define LOVE as
“SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND THE OTHER.” LISTEN!

In our story today Jesus comes NEEDING a listening heart...
Jesus, who is FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH...

Jesus who repeatedly models STOPPING for OTHERS...
Jesus, who lives in INTIMACY with his ABBA-AMMA GOD...

Jesus, like all human beings, needs a God in human flesh.
In this passage the Incarnate One comes seeking the
incarnation of love, needing someone to LISTEN!

I love this story of a needy Jesus, because it tells us that we
DON'T have to be apologetic when we NEED A GOOD
LISTENER... and when we are too full to be present for
another.

I remember lying in a hospital bed, having just given birth to
not only our 2nd child, but also to a surprising 3rd who just
happened to show up in that delivery room. Our twin
children were in the NICU and one was not doing very well
A good friend came into my hospital room and started
telling me about the rough day she had had at work, and I
had to stop her in mid-sentence and say,

"I'm sorry, but I really have no capacity to hear right now. I
just need someone to sit with me in my overwhelming
circumstance and LISTEN!"

We do not know what Jesus is sharing with Mary...
maybe he's telling her about that savvy, lawyer who's just
tried to snare him with hard questions.

or maybe he's sharing his despair about a Jerusalem who
refuses to learn the ways that make for peace, and how
utterly frightening the world landscape looks right now.

Or maybe he's bringing sadness because his closest companions remain in denial about what's on the horizon.

Or maybe he's sharing his grief that religious leaders (who claim to love God) have so little concern for the poor and marginalized and keep drawing lines that exclude them.

Or perhaps this is a teaching moment, and Jesus is eager to share with Mary... that the Kingdom of God is NOT dominated by males (even though this has been the teaching for generations). Maybe Jesus is eager to open a new door for Mary to the liberating God whose children are ALL worthy of dignity and equal regard."

We don't know what is being shared in that living room in Martha's house.

We only know that Mary provides a listening presence and spiritual hospitality that is MOST NEEDED...the one thing necessary.

"Spiritual hospitality" that is how Henri Nouwen defines LISTENING.

Nouwen also says:

"To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make THEIR presence known. They are free to receive, welcome, accept. Listening is much more than ALLOWING another to speak

while waiting for a chance to respond. It 's paying Full attention & welcoming another into our own beings.”

Mary sits at Jesus' feet paying attention. This kind of Availability requires letting go and befriending ourselves with all our foibles:

Karl Jung said at the end of his life said that his greatest learning was:

“to climb down 10,000 ladders and make friends with the clod of earth that he is.”

And it seems like Mary has done this... emptied herself of the kind of self-consciousness that keeps the focus on her, emptied herself of the need to bow to all the “shoulds and oughts” coming from the *banging* in the kitchen.

When we've made friends with our incompleteness, taken our brokenness to tea, and in our failures let ourselves be forgiven again & again....

THEN.. we know that no ladder or task is as important as the person beside us...another stumbling human being on the journey of life. Mary **makes room** in the living room of her soul and finds GOD enfleshed in the one before her and Jesus finds God enfleshed in the one before him.

My friend Willi-Hugo Perez is the rector at Semilla, the Anabaptist seminary in Guatamala City..

Many years ago when Willi was emerging from a life of violence, drug and alcohol addiction, and trauma from the war that had murdered his father, he visited a very poor family in a community where there was no electricity and 8 people lived in a small, very dim room.

In that family there were 6 children and their mother. Their alcoholic father was seldom home.

And Willi –Hugo says:

“I saw a daughter of this family and asked her name.

My name is Martha

How old are you, Martha?

Eight

Martha, do you go to school?

No, my mother is too poor.

Martha, would you like to go to school?

Yes, I'd like to go to school. I'd like to be a teacher.

Martha, do you think sometime you will get to go to school?

Yes, sometime.

Martha, how will that be possible?

I think someone will help me.

Martha, who will help you?

I think God will help me through someone like you.

Willi-Hugo goes on to say, "I was crying because God was RIGHT there calling me through 8 year old Martha!

I saw plainly that day that God works through someone like me. AND It's up to us to INCARNATE the tangible love of God."

If you attended the funeral service for Mark Yoder last Sunday and the meal that followed, you heard story after story of how people found the acceptance of Jesus enfleshed in Mark who took time to SIT with them, to BE present, LISTEN, ENCOURAGE and OFFER GRACE.

This is the season of EPIPHANY ...and the great "AHA" of incarnation in our midst, if only we have ears to hear and eyes to see the light.

If we listen to 2 year olds who perceive God hiding in us and 8 year olds who believe God will act through people like us...

if we climb down 10,000 ladders and make friends with the clods we are, knowing God calls us ADORABLE there... and seek to understand one another across our differences,

If we pull up a chair to our neighbor's needs and offer time and availability...

Maybe this is how enemies become friends.

Maybe this is how the WORLD is disarmed little by little .

AND Maybe God's desires will be done on Earth, as it is in heaven.

When we discover that Jesus is in the living room of not only OUR souls, but also in the souls of those we meet and greet...

Then we will meet the Christ...who is

waiting to come out and say "BOO!" HERE I AM! Listen!

(It IS the one thing necessary!)