

Our Expedition: Pilgrims on God's Great Adventure Deciding



Luke 10:28-42. <read scripture passage from NRSV>



When I was a little girl growing up I was told that it was not polite to ask an adult how old they were. Whenever I asked my Grandma how old she was she would reply, "as old as my tongue and a little older than my teeth."

I read a story the other day about a bright little girl who asked her grandmother the same question that I used to ask mine. Her grandma told her "that when you get to my age, you don't share that kind of information." That's okay, the little girl said, I saw your driving license on your dresser in the bedroom. It had your eye color and other information on it and your date of birth. I worked out you are 76 years old. That's right said her grandmother. Then, after a pause, the little girl added, "I'm sorry you got an 'F' in sex."¹ !!!

In the year 2010 although driving licenses may grade us and pigeon hole us into categories, women have plenty of opportunities to excel and earn an 'A.' As women, we have the vote, we can go out to work, we can be educated, and we are not the property of our fathers or our husbands.

But in Jesus' day, it was a patriarchal society. Women were not allowed to be educated and they certainly did not sit at the feet of male guests. Last week's scripture reading where Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan was immediately preceding this week's passage. The Samaritan was the unlikely hero of the story. Jesus turned the tables on his listeners. Who was the neighbor in the story? The Samaritan, their enemy, was the one who showed mercy, the one who had compassion. That was scandalous. And this week's scripture is just as scandalous.



Imagine the scene. ... Martha and Mary have a guest coming for dinner. Hospitality rules say that you need to be a good hostess. So, like all women of her time, Martha was trying to put on a good meal for Jesus. The timing had to be just right. The table needed setting. Drinks had to be provided. The vegetables needed chopping. Pots were bubbling and needed stirring. Martha was all set to get an "A" for cooking and an "Outstanding" for effort. She needs her sister's help though. And Mary is not helping. She has vanished. Martha is the one doing the act of mercy while Mary slouches off. Martha is getting frustrated and wants Mary's help and finally in exasperation she bursts into the other room and blurts out, "Jesus, tell Mary to come to the kitchen. It is not fair that I have to do all the work on my own."

What would you decide? Do you side with Martha who is being a good hostess? Or with Mary who is breaking the cultural taboos and sitting at the feet of the Rabbi just like the men?

When I first read this, I thought that Jesus gave an "A" to Mary for sitting, and an "F" to Martha for hospitality. But when I read it carefully I realized that he doesn't judge Martha at all. Jesus doesn't fix

¹ Quoted from C.R. Swindoll, *Laugh Again*, (Word) in *Sunday Sermons* vol. 28 no. 4 (Ventor, NJ: Voicings Publications, 1998), 13.

their sibling quarrel. He doesn't criticize Martha's cooking. He doesn't tell her to stop being a good hostess. He doesn't point out that she is being petty. He says nothing at all about her work. He doesn't choose between them. What he does do is acknowledge Mary. Jesus supports her choice of sitting and listening at this particular time.

And in allowing her to sit at his feet, Jesus was saying to Mary, "No" you don't get an "F" in life. Women are as welcome as men. You are a child of God. You are valuable. Come, its okay. Sit and listen for a while.

Sit and listen. Be still. <long pause>

When we listen though we might hear something. We might hear the cry of our brothers and sisters whose report cards still say "F."

Just this week the United Methodist Board of Church and Society put a call out to United Methodists to urge President Obama and the Senate to support the *United Nations Convention Treaty on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women*. President Obama has pledged support for women worldwide by making ratification of the treaty a priority, YET the United States is one of only SEVEN countries that have not yet signed it. By ratifying the treaty, a worldwide message would be sent that the U.S. is serious in its support of basic human rights. Other countries would be encouraged to include provisions from the treaty in their constitutions and domestic laws.²

2000 years after Jesus recognized Mary's humanity and her right to sit at his feet, women are still treated as possessions, denied an education, restricted in health choices, abused physically, and are unequally compensated. There is an increasing awareness that we cannot solve the world's problems associated with globalization and unequal distribution of resources, population growth, poverty, and war so long as the talents and potential of half the world's people are disregarded and even repressed. As Jesus did, we must stand against cultural patterns and prejudices that inhibit women and girls (or anyone else) from full participation in life.

Jesus also said "Mary has *chosen* the better part." Martha was distracted and worried. We need our attention to be in the right place, and there are times when that means when we need to decide to simply sit and listen.

We need to notice what is needed. What Jesus needed at that point in time was not food but company. Whose company are we keeping?

The more we keep Christ company, then the more we will understand what God wants us to do. Are we doing what we want to do or are we doing what God wants us to do?

James Moore tells this story about a successful executive³ who was driving his Porsche down a neighborhood street. He slowed down as passed some parked cars and felt a thump. A brick had hit his car. He got out and started to shout at the young lad who was standing on the curb. The boy started to cry. Sorry, mister, but I didn't know what to do. I couldn't get anyone to stop. He pointed to a spot out of site beyond the parked car. It's my brother. He fell out of his wheelchair and he is hurt and he is too heavy for me to lift. Will you help me? The young executive swallowed the lump in his throat and rushed over to help. The boy thanked him and went on his way down the sidewalk. The

² <http://www.umc-gbcs.org/site/apps/nlnet/content.aspx?c=frLJK2PKLqF&b=6126157&ct=8501545> (accessed 7/13/2010).

³ James Moore, *If God Has a Refrigerator Your Picture is on it* (Nashville: Dimensions for Living, 2003), 133-4.

man never did repair the dent in his Porsche. He kept it there to remind him not to go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at you to get your attention.

How is God trying to get our attention? What bricks are being thrown at us? Are we listening? How do we listen?



One of the things that I really appreciate about being a United Methodist is the way we balance our love of God with our love of our neighbors.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism lived modestly and gave all he could to help people who were poor, visited people in prison and provided food and clothing to them, spoke out against slavery, founded schools, published books, pamphlets, and magazines for the education and spiritual edification of people, taught and wrote about good health practices and even dispensed medicine from his chapels. He called these *Acts of Mercy*.

But he also emphasized the importance of what he called *Acts of Piety*. *Acts of Piety* are the ways that we have today of sitting and listening at Jesus' feet, the ways that God uses to get our attention. Wesley named 5 of these: prayer, reading scripture, fasting, worship, and holy communion. These are the things we need to choose to do, to make a regular part of our lives when we find ourselves distracted, so that people do not have to throw bricks at us.

Our small groups will start up again in September and we'll all have an opportunity to study together. I am excited that there is also the opportunity to go up the hill to Auburn to join with our friends from this UM circuit for an in-depth year-long Bible Study. I hope that as many as possible of you will take advantage of this.

Last week we talked about navigating our way on our faith journey using God's Positioning System. By loving the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Today, as we think about the choices that we face and the decisions we will make, we need to remember to both Love the Lord our God, by maintaining the vertical relationship through acts of piety, and to love our neighbor maintaining the horizontal relationship through acts of mercy.

But the two are intertwined. We gain strength from the time spent with God in prayer, and reading the Bible and in worship. This time we spend sitting and listening gives us the power and the motivation for the acts of mercy. We may love those who are easy to love, but without Christ firmly in the center of our lives we will not find the strength to risk our comfort to love those who are less easy to love.

By sitting and listening, we become ready for going and doing. After going and doing, we need to spend time sitting and listening.

...and paying attention. Now, if you've been paying attention for the last few weeks you've probably seen the advertisements for the California State Fair, which say: *An Adventure Waiting Inside!* By all means go inside and enjoy yourselves there if you like, but we are called by God to embark on a different kind of adventure, one that takes us outside of man-made walls. Our lives are holy adventures that include not just ourselves but also our loved ones, and the rest of the world. We share in this magnificent journey partnering with God where the present moment and the future are shaped by the decisions that we make as the Kingdom of God is called into existence.

The advertisements also say: *California State Fair – your passport to adventure!* But on God's adventure, all are issued passports not just those who can afford the admission, not just those with the right qualifications, and not just those who make the grade. We are all invited to be Christ's companions on this holy adventure.

Our true adventure is outside where boys are still throwing rocks at cars and girls need a chance to earn an "A."

Jesus says "Mary has chosen the better part." Which part will we choose?

Let us pray.

O God of love and compassion, Forgive us when we become distracted and do not pay attention. Help us to listen to you and to keep you at the center of our lives as our guide. Give us hearts of compassion and a desire to reach out to those who are not treated justly. Teach us how to balance our lives so that we find a rhythm with times of going and doing and times of sitting and listening. Help us to make wise decisions as we travel together as pilgrims on your holy adventure. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.