

Christ Church, 17 July 2022

Call to worship (based on Luke 10:38-42)

Come and worship!
Be still and aware of God's presence
within and around you.
Come and worship!
Be still and aware of Jesus' presence
within and around you.
Come and worship!
Be still and aware of the Spirit's presence
within and around you.
Calm the many distractions and come to worship God!

Hymn Praise to the Lord R&S 74 (more modern words, deliberately chosen, on the screen)

Praise to the Lord, the almighty, the king of creation!
O my soul, praise God, for he is your health and salvation!
Come, all who hear; brothers and sisters draw near,
praise God in glad adoration!

Praise to the Lord, above all things so mightily reigning;
keeping us safe at God's side and so gently sustaining.
Have you not seen all you have needed has been
met by God's gracious ordaining?

Praise to the Lord, who shall prosper our work and defend us;
surely God's goodness and mercy shall daily attend us.
Ponder anew what the almighty can do,
who with his love will befriend us.

Praise to the Lord - O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him!
Let the "Amen!" sound from God's people again;
gladly with praise we adore him!

Joachim Neander (1650-80)

Children's Time – two sisters

Opening Prayer

God for everything there is a time,
and time is the most precious thing we have.
Our clocks are always running, from birth to death:
during times of happiness and sadness:
work and play: business and pleasure:
speech and silence: worship and church activities:
We are like Martha, with our long to-do lists.
Slow us down Lord, and for now, for this morning at least
remind us that we only need one thing
to listen to You and know that you are God. Amen.

Offertory

Holy One, all that we have comes from you. Accept our gifts for your work in the world,
and to you be the glory and praise always. **Amen**

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Hymn Hostess Martha (tune *Frere Jacques*)

(All) Hostess Martha, work much faster,
rush about; sort things out!
So much preparation
needs determination.
What a fright! Must do right!

(Jesus) Martha, Martha! Stop your bluster!
Let her stay, for today!
Sharing conversation
is no derogation.
Don't take fright! Mary's right

(Martha) Useless sister, help-resister,
sitting there, not a care!
At the feet of Jesus?
Is she out to tease us?
What a fright! Can't be right

(Jesus) Martha, Martha! Hear me better:
you must be bold and free:
free from set restrictions,
follow your convictions!
Don't take fright! Mary's right

(Martha) Teacher Jesus, rule between us!
make her see what must be:
she must help in caring,
all my duties sharing.
What a fright! Put her right

(All) Sister, brother, and whoever,
you can be bold and free;
Jesus and the Spirit
show us what has merit.
Stop your fright! Life comes right

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Children leave for Sunday Club. Say the Grace

Prayer and Declaration of Forgiveness

Ever-faithful God, whose being is perfect righteousness:
reconcile us through your Son with the helpless and the needy,
with those we would ignore or oppress,
and with those we have called enemies,
heal disagreements and discord,
that we may serve all people as your hands of love,
and sit at the feet of those who need our compassionate care. Amen.
Remember that God forgives us and gives us the grace to change our lives.
Have courage, forgive yourselves, listen at the feet of Jesus and learn compassion and
understanding. Amen

Hymn There's a wideness in God's mercy R&S 353 (omit v 2)

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader
than the measure of our mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

There is grace enough for thousands
of new worlds as great as this;
there is room for fresh creations
in the Lord's unfathomed bliss.

If our love were but more simple,
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined,
by the glory of the Lord.

F.W. Faber (1814-63)

Bible readings: **Amos 8:1-12**
 Luke 10:38-42

Just as we had last week with the story of the Good Samaritan, this week Luke's gospel again gives us a very well-known story that we have probably heard many times. A story of only four verses, of two very different sisters. One who is practical, Martha, and one who is more spiritual, Mary, and on this occasion at least Jesus seems to side with Mary, that she has chosen the better thing – listening to him, rather than Martha who is distracted by her chores and all the things she has to do.

But, as with many stories in the Bible, things are not quite as they seem. This is just a snapshot of one encounter with these two sisters and Jesus. In fact they become very close friends and believers in Jesus. Mary and Martha are the sisters of Lazarus, and we see them on two other occasions, in John's gospel, when their roles and actions are not such opposites of each other.

The next time we see the sisters is when their brother Lazarus has died. When Martha hears that Jesus is coming, she goes out to meet him while Mary stays at home. As soon as she meets him, Martha says to Jesus, if you had been here, our brother would not have died. They then have a conversation in which Jesus asks her if she believes that those who believe in him will never die and she says, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God.' So clearly, by this point Martha has been listening to the words of Jesus, as well as doing her housework and ticking off her to-do list. Maybe Jesus has visited them many times, when perhaps both Mary and Martha share in the chores and both of them sit and listen to Jesus. We don't know, the Bible doesn't tell us. But it seems to me from the way he interacts with them and the fact that he cries at the death of Lazarus, or more specifically when he sees Mary crying over her brother's death, that he knows them very well and may have stayed at their house many times as it was within walking distance of Jerusalem in Bethany. If you want to read the whole of this story it is in John chapter 11.

The next time we see Mary and Martha, and the raised Lazarus, is in the week before the Passover – the last week of Jesus' life, when he has dinner with them at their house.

Lazarus sits at the table with Jesus and we are told that Martha serves – so she is still performing her practical duties. This was normal in the culture and times then. While, normally families ate together, if there was a male guest, only the men would sit and eat with him, and the women would serve them. The fact that Jesus stayed at their house just a week before he entered Jerusalem and died, shows what close friends they had become. On this occasion, Mary takes the costly perfume and anoints Jesus' feet and wipes them with her hair.

But back to the story we heard today. We are told that Martha welcomes Jesus into her home. As a male guest, he would have been invited to eat and that would have been with

the man of the house, their brother Lazarus, although he is not mentioned here. It would have been normal then, for the women to prepare the food and serve the men. But Mary does not do the normal thing. She breaks with protocol. It would be like someone meeting the Queen and not curtseying. Back then it was a big deal. That is probably why it is recorded in the gospel, because it was unusual. Whenever a woman broke protocol—grasping his clothes, asking him directly for a healing, intimately washing his feet, talking to him at the well, it is recorded. And Jesus is known for breaking the traditions of his time and culture with regards to women. He talks to women when he shouldn't. He talks to the Samaritan woman at the well, when no other Jewish man would do that. He lets women follow him and touch him. Jesus likes breaking unhelpful rules and he likes when others do it. Is that perhaps why he praises Mary and says she has chosen the better thing? Not because she is not helping her sister with the chores, but because she is willing to break with tradition to listen to the word of God. Mary shockingly breaks custom by acting like a disciple, sitting and listening. At that time women weren't permitted to receive an education. They were discouraged from even talking to men. They couldn't so much as recite prayers at meals, so Jesus' response to Mary's choice was recorded because it was abnormal. And this Mary goes on to break tradition again in a scandalous way when she anoints him with costly perfume causing Judas to say, what a waste! That perfume could have been sold for a lot of money to give to the poor. And, Jesus again defends Mary's actions.

While in the verses we heard today, Mary and Martha are set against each other – Martha is the practical one, and Mary is the spiritual one and the implication is that we should be more like Mary, things are not that simple. In all walks of life, but particularly in churches, there are people who identify with Martha – who like to get on with things, who will go on the coffee rota, who will volunteer for everything, who will take on as many jobs as they can, but won't perhaps ever go to a prayer meeting, or a Bible Study or a House Group, and who like Martha have a bit of a chip on their shoulder, because other people, the 'Marys' only like to pray and reflect, and listen intently to the sermons and never do anything practical. Now of course I am exaggerating a bit, there will of course be people who are both practical and spiritual, people who help with practical things and take their turns on the rotas and volunteering and pray and listen to God too. But we have been told this story so many times, and it simply isn't the case that we have to be one or the other. We all need to listen to God, and we all then need to take action to live out the love of God in service to others. We need people who pray, and we need volunteers to keep activities going; and one can't survive without the other.

Mary and Martha have distinct personalities, but they are not so different from each other. Both of them are both practical and spiritual. Both of them loved and served Jesus, using the different talents they had. There is a risk involved in labelling someone based upon one or two incidents in their lives. People are much more complex than that, with different characters and different experiences that will make them act the way they do. This story of Mary and Martha, only represents a few minutes in the lives of complex women who have lived through many experiences, like the sudden death of their much-loved brother. And they both broke with tradition in their own ways. Mary was revolutionary and radical in what she did. To modern ears, it may not sound like much that she sat and listened to Jesus while her sister did all the serving and washing up, and we might well find ourselves siding with Martha, that she was maligned and put upon and her sister should have been doing her fair share, and we ignore the message from Jesus, that we should go out and be more like Mary – break with tradition, break the mould, listen to the word of God and go and act on it.

Hymn Is it enough to serve (tune *Down Ampney* at R&S 294)

Is it enough to serve,
rushing to help, with verve,
and spend ourselves in lives of active caring?
Should we not stop and see,
in Jesus' company,
if love is better served by our receiving?

Is it enough to play,
always and ev'ry day,
the role that others seem to be expecting?
Should we not risk instead,
whatever may be said,
a life that lets our God keep on subverting?

Is it enough to care,
offer our help and prayer,
but keep our welcome safe within our building?
Might we unleash more good,
here in our neighbourhood,
by breaking out of careful church constraining?

So, Jesus, meet us now,
touch us and show us how,
with Martha, we can risk your full renewing.
Then, in a Mary way,
journeying on each day,
we'll share a hopeful, healing, new beginning.

Lord's Supper

We remember, as we do at every communion service, the gift of the life and death of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Come to this table, you who are beloved in Christ. Come, not because you must, but because you may.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.
You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.
You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people throughout the generations, and the gathered wisdom of many years.
You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up in difficult times where there was little peace.
He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.
He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.
He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.
For these things, he suffered. For these things, he died.
And he was raised from death and lives with you forever.
You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us, to remind us of Jesus Christ and to make us one in him.
For all these gifts we thank you, and join with all your people on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine,
and upon your people, that Christ may be with us,
and we may be ready to live for you
and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. Amen

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Sharing of bread and wine

Most gracious God, we thank you for what you have given us.
You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.
Now we give ourselves to you, and ask that our daily living may be part of the life of your kingdom,
and that our love may be your love
reaching out into the life of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayers of intercession

Our God, we give you thanks:
For those who have gone before us and from whose questions, struggles to understand and wisdom we benefit.
Thank you for the Mary and Martha's of our life and our church.

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For the gifts of new possibilities that await, in spite of our distractions,
especially here in this place, as we contemplate our mission
and seek to discern how to be more a part of the community around us.

For those who see things we cannot because of our fear, our past experiences, or our stubbornness
For those who wonder in ways that surprise us, invite us and challenge us
For those who work so hard and continue to do so
even when we take them for granted, when we betray them,
when we neglect to treat them with justice or respect,
when we assume and presume and then are shocked at their rebellion

Our God, we give you thanks that it is not all about us,
that you continue to care and to love
and to create possibilities of redemption and new life
not only here among us but throughout your world.
Help us get over ourselves enough
to be able to sit in your presence, like Mary
Help us to have the humility and the courage to wonder,
if only for a moment, if you are about something game changing
Help us to carry that same spirit of curiosity and discovery
beyond these walls into the world in which we serve and which you love.

So let us, in your name, dare to hope
Let us dare to hope
For peace in the Middle East as we come to support the region of Israel and Palestine
through Commitment for Life. And for peace and stability in Sri Lanka.
Let us dare to hope, that no child will go to sleep hungry and none
will find shelter under a piece of cardboard. And we give thanks for the witness of Sir Mo Farah
and dare to hope that no other child will ever be trafficked.
That violence will be absent from families
Let us dare to hope that you have not forgotten even us,
even at this place and time in our lives.
Make us a dangerous people – for once not to each other
but to all those resentments, preconceptions
and reasons why Your future should not be the future,
for your church AND for your creation.
We only dare such craziness
because we sit in the presence of One whose prayer we echo...

Lord's Prayer

Hymn We sing a love Tune at R&S 740 – Tell out my soul

We sing a love that sets all people free,
that blows like wind, that burns like scorching flame,
enfolds the earth, springs up like water clear:
come, living love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love that seeks another's good,
that longs to serve and not to count the cost,
a love that, yielding, finds itself made new:
come, caring love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love, unflinching, unafraid
to be itself, despite another's wrath,
a love that stands alone and undismayed:
come, strengthening love, live in our hearts today.

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We sing a love that, wandering, will not rest
until it finds its way, its home, its source,
through joy and sadness pressing on refreshed:
come, pilgrim love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a burning, fiery, Holy Ghost
that seeks out shades of ancient bitterness,
transfiguring these, as Christ in every heart:
come, joyful love, live in our hearts today.

June Boyce-Tillman © 1993, Stainer & Bell Ltd.

Blessing

Go out into the world as both Martha and Mary
loving the Lord your God
with all your heart, soul, mind and strength,
and loving others as yourself.
And may God give you justice and freedom;
May Christ Jesus set you free for love;
and may the Holy Spirit guide you and protect you on your way.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord, In the name of Christ. Amen.

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