

Message Date: 12-13-20

ADVENT 2020: **God's Gift for Right Now**

Week 1: The Gift of Simplicity

✠ **Talk to the hand!**

- *Have you ever become angry during a sermon? You know, where you hear what the pastor said, and in your heart you replied... THAT'S ALL WELL AND GOOD preach, but you have no clue what my life is like, and if you did, you might think a little deeper about what you're telling me!*
- *If I sound personal there, it's because I've had that experience, back before I was a pastor, and honestly, sometimes even when I'm the one speaking.*
- *A particularly vivid memory is when the pastor was talking about how our faith in Christ should lead us to have a simple, peaceful life. If we were good disciples, we would remove the distractions and activities that prevented us from daily personal quiet time/bible study, a quiet walk outdoors with Jesus a few times a week, participation in a small group, and of course faithful attendance to church every week.*
- *Now, at that point I was working around 60 hours a week, Lisa and I had two young children, she ran an in-home daycare, and we just had TONS of free time. NOT. Rather than being inspired, my reaction to the sermon was... 'That would be great preacher. Must be nice to have all that spare time. Talk to the hand.'*
- *It is a fair criticism of Christian culture that we are prone to truisms, pat answers, and claiming promises God hasn't made. These can be like 'spiritual white elephant gifts'... ideas that sound good and may be pleasing when received, but after we take them home often have little real value.*
 - *To a person with sincere questions about God, we may say "just have faith"*
 - *To a person with great needs, we may say, "pray and trust God to provide"*
 - *To a person who is hurting, we may say "God knows what you are going through"*
- *There is truth in all these statements. Ultimately, knowing God is a matter of faith. God does call us to trust him. And God certainly knows and understands what we experience.*
- *AND YET, left on their own, these well intentioned thoughts may miss the deeper truth to which they point. This is truth that requires us to think, to wrestle, to learn, and most of the time that is a journey, not something that happens in the moment.*
- *Part of my journey has been discovering how that irritating sermon all those years ago was in fact very true.*

✠ Reality! Through our faith in Him, Jesus really does want us to receive the gift of SIMPLICITY. But not in a superficial way denying the reality that life is rarely simple! Rather, in a way that asks us to consider the question- deeply- of what is most IMPORTANT. Of what is BEST.

– ***BUT, before open that box, TODAY is SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13th, 2020, PE, TO, thanks...***

- *The gospels are full of stories about Jesus' interactions with other people. His disciples... his antagonists.. Phar/Sadducees... common people whose lives were changed by their encounter. But few of these stories are as deeply personal, and relatable to our lives, as the stories involving Jesus' relationship with three siblings- Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus.*
- *The first time we encounter Mary and Martha is in Luke 10, when Martha opened their home to Jesus. It's a famous encounter, and a situation to which we all can relate.*

Luke 10:38-42 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

- **Who are you in this story? Martha, or Mary?**
 - **First, you have Mary. Sense is that from the moment he arrived, Mary's focus was completely on Jesus. Listening, learning. I'm not Mary. In fact, I'm often irritated by people like Mary.**
 - **Martha, on the other hand, is the leader of the household. She is the one who extended the hospitality of taking Jesus into their home. Martha is focused on the tasks at hand, which are actually very good things, things that need to be done. She is being a good hostess, preparing her home and a meal for Jesus, her and Martha, and possibly the other disciples.**
 - **And she's doing this all by herself, while he is just sitting there with Jesus!**
 - **The source of tension is obvious! In Martha's mind, she is being responsible, and Mary is being irresponsible- otherwise she would get up and help. Mary, for her part, seems oblivious to everything needing to be done, she is completely captivated with Jesus. Finally, in great frustration, she appeals to Jesus, not so subtly accusing Him of neglecting her efforts himself.**
- "Lord, don't **YOU** care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"
- **Practically ever since Luke wrote this story down, people have been making observations and teaching lessons about what we can learn here from Mary and Martha. LOT HERE. Today, lets focus on just one thing, and that is Jesus' response.**

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, **(anxious and distracted)** ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

✠ What Jesus didn't say!

- **It's important to note what Jesus DIDN'T SAY.**
 - He didn't say her tasks were unimportant.
 - He didn't say they shouldn't be done.
 - He didn't criticize Martha for attending to the work.
 - He didn't say that what Martha was doing wasn't GOOD... he simply said there was something BETTER.

✠ When it came to everything Martha needed to get done, Jesus' invitation into the peace of simplicity wasn't a change of details. It was a change of PRIORITIES.

- **You can feel the gentleness in Luke's account. Perhaps Jesus got up, went to Martha, and took her by the hands. We tend to think she was angry, but she very likely could have been crying.**
- **MARTHA... MARTHA... look at me... and then Jesus cuts to the core of her heart- and of ours--- YOU ARE ANXIOUS, UPSET, DISTRACTED by so many things. I understand these things need to get done. You may need to let go of a few details, but there will be time for what needs to get done. BUT Martha, don't you know that my presence, my love, isn't**

contingent on how well you perform? Don't you know that your value to me isn't on your ability to control everything, on everything being perfect? Martha... I so appreciate your hospitality and your wonderful home... but what I really want is YOU.

- *This is what Mary has chosen- to be with me, and I won't turn her away. Martha- all these things that worry you- many of them are good things, but they are temporary. They could be taken away. But when you CHOOSE TO BE WITH ME, when being with ME is your greater desire, I will never be taken away from you.*

✝ From Martha to me

- *Friends, our lives, our culture, is so busy. Business and complexity have always been part of the human experience, but in the past generation we have put this into overdrive with the advent of social media and the almost infinite array of choices – and demands- about how we will spend our time. Especially in this season of life we are a people who are ANXIOUS, WORRIED, DISTRACTED about so many things.*
- *In the midst of these pressures of life, Jesus comes to us and invites us to choose what is most important. Faced with the demands and stress of many good things, Jesus directs our attention to the one necessary thing- and that is HIM.*
- *AND church... as we learn to make Jesus our first place passion, as we come to see – by faith- that HE is the only source of life that will not fail us, this is where the gift of simplicity begins. Few thoughts...*

✝ Life becomes simpler when our IDENTITY in Christ helps us put things in perspective.

- *There may be much we need to get done, but we can engage these tasks with less stress and worry when as we increasingly really believe our contentment, hope, and peace are rooted in Christ, not in our ability to control any outcome.*

✝ Life becomes simpler when we are less DISTRACTED.

- *The NASB translates the Greek for 'troubled' as 'distracted', and the underlying word carries the meaning of being surrounded by a clamor, of things being tumultuous. The image is of being so distracted by everything around us that we miss what is most important. (Relate anyone??)*

WHEN our reference point in life is CHRIST- God's truth AND what is TRUE OF US IN CHRIST - the Spirit will be at work to keep our eyes on what is most important, while still being engaged in the important details of life. THIS IS BIG TOPIC, but simple illustration... BOAT, everything is in motion- can make you SICK. Tool to overcome motion sickness when everything is moving... keep your eyes on the horizon... on what is NOT MOVING. When everything in our life seems to be in motion, Christ invites us to keep our focus on the one thing that is permanent... HIM, his presence, his truth and grace.

- *LAST- When our greatest desire is Christ himself... when our contentment, fullness, LIFE flows from our faith relationship with Him, then we will come to see that some things we thought were important really aren't.*

✝ Jesus gives us the gift of simplicity by helping us see what we should really LET GO

- *These activities that takes so much from me... maybe I realize that I'm chained to them because I've allowed my identity to get wrapped up in them, and they are robbing me of what is most important... In Christ, I can have the trust and peace to let go...*
 - *These things I pay for that require me to work so hard, or go into debt... perhaps they are not as important and live giving as I thought they were.*
 - *This sin- something profoundly unhealthy- this bondage that is eating at my time, my finances, and my heart... as Christ becomes my true desire, he will show me there is hope of living without them... I can trust him to take the steps- perhaps with help from other people- to begin the journey into freedom.*
- **CHURCH**—*life is rarely simple. God knows this. But as Christ increasingly becomes our greatest desire- the Holy Spirit will work in our lives so we may begin to experience the gift of simplicity.*

† Epilogue

- *There's an epilogue to the story of Martha and Jesus. Some months later, Martha saw Jesus again, and this time she was devastated. As you know, her beloved brother, Lazarus, became very ill and has died.*
- *You know the story... Jesus and his disciples arrive after Lazarus has already died, and hearing that Jesus was coming, Martha went out to meet him, while Mary stayed in the house. We will pick up the story in John 11:21*

John 11:21 *“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”²⁴ Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”*

- *Somewhere between the anxiety of a house full of distractions and the loss of her brother, Martha had come to understand what was most important. She came to understand that Jesus wasn't just an honored guest demanding her best performance, He was life itself.*
- *This Christmas season, with all the demands life is placing upon us, what is most important? Perhaps you are like Mary, and it seems second nature to seek Christ first. BUT, maybe we are like MARTHA, frustrated, even angered by our circumstances. If that is where we are, may we follow Martha's steps to discover that our relationship with Jesus is the most important thing, that HE is life itself, and that His presence, His goodness, will never be taken from us.*
- **PRAY.**