

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

July 17, 2022



MYSELF

taking all of it on is not the point

by Drew Downs

Mary and Martha are a familiar pair. One does work and the other lounges with Jesus. At least, that's how it is often read.

there is a great familiarity present in the story. We know these two people. Because we know their conflict. It is often ours.

Many resonate with Martha's plight. It is easy to focus on how Mary isn't directly helping Martha with her work.

Except that *Martha* thinks she must do it all herself. She says as much. No matter that Jesus didn't ask her for any of it. Nor is he expecting her to do anything!

Like Martha, how much of our frustration with other people is all in our heads? How much of my "I have to do everything myself!" is my own creation?

What if Jesus really is asking us to just not?

ORDINARY TIME

Summer 2022

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

This year, I've broken one of my cardinal rules. Obviously the primary rule is not to do work on vacation. I'm not breaking that. But the fact that you are reading this now proves I broke the rule I had to make for myself: don't do twice as much work before you go on vacation.

See, I started this rule years ago because I had a hard time going on vacation (see last week). But it was made *worse* by the actual experience of going on vacation as a solo priest-in-charge about ten years ago.

I discovered that I had to do about three weeks of work the week before I left. And then I had extra sitting on my desk when I came back. In a sense, it felt like I wasn't getting *vacation*. I was just front-loading it all.

So I stopped.

Since the Pandemic, the online part of the job has exploded, so there is way more of that. And this year, I don't want to leave our people hanging. I know it is only a few weeks. I totally can just drop it. But I wanted to do this. At least for now. This time.

I wonder how you feel about time away? About your responsibilities and how you work with them. How might you provide for those you love in ways that nourish and inspire, but also leave room for *you*?

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

Summer 2022

FOR SUNDAY

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

July 17, 2022

Collect

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Luke 10:38-42

"But Martha was distracted by her many tasks"

Reflection

For all the many times I've read this story, I don't think I ever *fully* appreciated that Martha is *distracted*.

This dispute between Mary and Martha is so rarely framed as a matter of distraction. Not in any of the sermons I've heard.

Our attention is more naturally drawn to the conflict. We are pulled into the feeling Martha has of being "put upon" and "always having to be responsible" because her "good for nothing sister" is "always" doing things like "living in the moment" and not "holding up her end".

ORDINARY TIME

A friend who was an engineer once told me that this is the most hated passage by engineers because the thoughtful planner who does all the work is chastised for doing what they do best. And Mary gets the praise for doing nothing.

We can certainly sympathize. Especially as we start to label each other as "Marthas and Marys". The ones who do the work to prepare the thing and the ones who entertain and live in the moment.

For a lot of people, especially for those who have such sympathy for Martha, this is not a generous moment from Jesus. It is a strangely obtuse one. One that they genuinely wish they could understand. Because they don't actually *like* getting mad at Jesus here.

Of course, none of this is real. It is a symptom of distraction. Which is so appropriate.

As I have been reading about ADHD and how distraction and attention work: for both the neurotypical and the neurodivergent: we get Martha and Mary as a remarkable example of how our attention can race *away* from the material at hand and *toward* the shiny object. Even for those who don't have ADHD.

For Martha, and her legion of supporters throughout history, we are missing the part of the story in which *she* just wasn't listening. She was operating on assumptions, refusing to communicate, bottling her frustration until it burst out in rage and condescension.

Meanwhile, Mary, often treated as the neurodivergent character, utilizes her superpower of hyperfocus on Jesus to be present with him; which is precisely what he wanted.

We are sometimes so oblivious to just how much process is a distraction for all of us. And that doing the right thing really is as simple as sitting with Jesus.

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
215 N. 7TH ST TERRE HAUTE IN 47807
812.232.5165

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG
