

## Find a New Groove When Others Gets Annoying (Luke 10:38-42)

*A sermon for the people of Grace UMC – Alamogordo & Tularosa (September 13, 2020)*

OK, Confession time... how many of you find yourself getting really annoyed with other people these days? It's ok, you're not alone, I promise! You're in good company because the *whole world* is teaming with people just like you, whom, it only takes a little bit of someone saying the wrong words, or doing the wrong thing to take you over the edge. Our world is at a tipping point, and I think so many of us our too... it is just so very easy to lose our cool, and to let that one, small thing just take us to the *N*th degree of frustration!

For me, lately, it's been the people at the grocery stores who can't follow the signs on the ground. Come on, people! If this sign *says this way, or not this way*, then go this way and not that way! It's really not that hard. I know that can of soup that you need is right around that corner, and but would it really kill you to take just an extra 60 seconds and turn around and go the way the store is so kindly asking you to go. I know you're already there in a masks, and you don't want to be. I know you just want to go out to eat, but you can't and now you're forced to cook another meal for the one-millionth time this year. I know how many things you have on your mind right now and the *last* think you want to do is to follow one more rule. But please, *please* just do it or so help me.... But it's just a sign, isn't it. It's just a simple rule, Kelly, you can keep following it, but is it really worth getting all worked up over if others don't?

You may be mocking me right now in the silence of your own minds, or maybe openly in the safety of your own homes, but tell me, you have your thing too, don't you? You have that co-worker whose doesn't cover their mouth when they sneeze. You have that spouse who is now *always home*! You have that neighbor who you're seeing way too much of these days.. Every little thing irks you, drives you crazy, if you have to look up the nose of one more person on a ZOOM call you're just going to lose it, and guess what, church, we're not just getting

frustrated, we're not just letting people get under our skin, we're taking it out on each other as well.

We've all seen the videos explode over social media in the past few months of individuals just losing it in stores and parking lots. Just sick of having to do this or that to just get by and exploding on others. Our episodes of explosion might not go viral, and they might not even be public, you may be exploding on the inside right now as I talk about all these things, but we all do it. We all lose it. We all, in some for or fashion, simply get annoyed with other people, and it truly brings out the worst in us. So how do we keep our cool? How do we find a new Groove when the groove we're currently living in is the worst sounding, most annoying, absolutely horrendous groove you've ever heard?

We all need a new groove, don't we? We all yearn for a new rhythm and a new pace that we can live our lives to, because the groove we've been thrust into these past 6 months just isn't work. And Church, I'm here to tell you, that the word's groove isn't going to get better anytime soon. I don't care what the news tells you, we all know that this COVID-19 tunnel we're in is likely to last a very long time. There's also not light at the end of the tunnel to the vitriolic and divided nation we live in not matter who wins the presidential election in just two months. And all those things that annoyed you about people yesterday are going to annoy you about them tomorrow. That thing you wife did yesterday, she's going to do it tomorrow. That thing your co-worker did on Friday, they're likely to do it on Monday. The thing your kids did this morning, they're going to do tomorrow morning. That thing your pastor does on Sundays, he'll probably do it again next Sunday. The people that go the wrong way at the grocery store are going to do it the next time I'm at the store as well... there is nothing I can do about it... I

can't thrust my preferred groove on those people who annoy me, but I can allow God to do a new groove *in me*... and that can truly change everything!

Growing up, some of our first experiences of getting annoyed by others is with our siblings, and while some of us grow out of that, some don't, and I think we have just such a relationship in our scripture passage from today's Gospel of Luke. Luke is one of the biographies of Jesus that's at the front of the section of the Bible we call the New Testament, and this particular story is only found in this biography that Luke wrote. Our main characters: Mary, Martha, and Jesus, are all included in other Gospels, but Luke especially was attracted to this interaction between these two sisters and Jesus because he saw exactly what the world needs to hear when our lives get so busy that we get so annoyed with people... just like today. If there was ever a scripture passage for a 2020, and the lives we've lived, I think this is one that might just teach us the most.

To set the stage, we have these two sisters—Mary and Martha—grown women who also live with their brother, Lazarus. Perhaps there are other members of the family in the household with them, but that we're not told. We know for sure that in this instance, Mary and Martha are for sure there, and one day, as they were going about their lives, Jesus arrives! And he's not just arriving alone, we've got to keep in mind that throughout the Gospels, wherever Jesus went, at least 12 others went with him, and at any given time that number could increase by the dozens or even the hundreds as his followers in addition to his 12 apostles closely followed their teacher wherever they went. So there's Martha, sweeping her front stoop, when all of a sudden she hears the noise of Jesus and his follower making their way down their dusty village streets, and she leaps at the chance to do one of the most honorable and blessed things

one could do in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine—she offers Jesus, and all of his followers, her hospitality.

This sort of welcome that Luke is talking about here isn't just standing on the porch and talking to Jesus for a few minutes like we might do when we see someone walking past our front yards. This isn't the sort of welcome that you invite someone in for half an hour or so and drink a cup of coffee. This is the sort of welcome where you better be prepared to give 110% of your best hospitality, food, drinks, comfort, *the works* for as long as your guest wants to stay. When Shannon and I lived in North Africa in a culture not too different from the culture that Jesus lived in 2000 years ago, when you invite someone into your home, you as the host are not allowed to ask them to leave for a full 72 hours. You've got to be fully prepared to possibly feed and sleep people for three days if you invite them in, and that's exactly the sort of welcome that Marth was inviting Jesus and his followers in for. So she's immediately getting to work, right? And for good reason. She has *a lot to do!* Because if she doesn't host and welcome and feed and provide comfort in the way that she's culturally obligated to, she and her whole household will be the shame of the city, because being a good or a bad host could either make or break your reputation in the world back then, and Martha knew it. This is more than just making sure Jesus is comfortable, her very honor was on the line.

So imagine her shock, imagine her annoyance, imagine her anger even when she looks for her sister Mary for help and she's nowhere to be found. She's not in the kitchen getting the meal ready. She's not in the store house gathering food. She's not out with the animals trying to find the best one to prepare for their guest. he's not at the village well drawing water. She's not anywhere to be found.. So as Marth is still looking for Mary, Martha's blood continues to boil, and her heart rate is getting ever so higher, just like mine does when I see that 10<sup>th</sup> person

go the wrong way down the aisle at the store. And as she turns the corner in their home and she walks into the living area, there she is, not helping at all, but instead she's sitting comfortably on the floor, like a guest. And in Mary's mind she doesn't see her sister faithfully seated before a wise and loving God in Jesus Christ, she sees her sister, doing what maybe she's often done, neglecting to help, and instead acting like a guest herself... so imagine just how annoyed Martha is right now, and in our worldly ways, rightly justified in her annoyance.

Church, there are things happening right now that are just not right, and in your mind, and in the minds of many people, are things that should annoy us, that should get under our skins, that should raise our heart rate, because wrong is wrong is wrong, right? And just like Martha, when we see something that's just not being done right, maybe it's our colleague, or our spouse, or our neighbor, or our pastor, we think we are perfectly justified in calling them out and even throwing a little pity party for ourselves, just like Martha did when she went up to Jesus in the middle of the living area with all the guests watching her publicly shame her sister in front of Jesus: **"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me" (Luke 10:40b).** And for 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, for a woman to step up and publicly speak against her sister like that in front of the invited guests is the equivalent of a temper tantrum in a Wal-Mart parking lot going viral on the internet. This was a big deal, big enough to show us 2000 years later reading it that Martha was royally perturbed! She had had it, and she just knew in her heart that she was in the right—that her rage, her frustration, her annoyance was justified, just like many of us feel on a regular basis these days.

Think about the most recent thing that someone did that annoyed you, that frustrated you, that got under your skin... maybe it was someone close to you, maybe it was someone you

saw on the news, maybe this person sitting with you right now. But I bet, many of us, as we think on whatever that was, we still feel like we were right to be annoyed, just as Martha did. But Jesus knew better, and so did Luke as he was writing this, because we're given a hint at the true root of Martha's struggles even before she was bold enough to call her sister out in front of everyone. In fact, in the same breath that we're told that Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet, we're also told of what was truly going on in Martha's heart: **"She [Martha] had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks..." (Luke 10:39-40a)**. Martha was distracted by her many tasks.... Church, when I read this through the lens of 2020, and through the lens of my own frustrations for others for just not doing what they're supposed to be doing, like Mary not doing the things that she was supposed to be doing, I realized that what if, just what if my annoyance actually has nothing to do with the person annoying me, what if it has everything to do with my distracted day, my distracted mind, my distracted heart, my distracted life!? It hits me like a ton of bricks every time I think about that, and I hope it does for you too, because there's one thing we can say for sure about 2020, it has filled our lives with so much distraction. Even in the boredom and monotony of quarantine and stay-at-home orders, we're still just so distracted, aren't we? And Jesus digs down even more, even deeper than simple distraction when he answers Martha's frustration. She's not just distracted, she's troubled and worried: **"Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things..." (Luke 10:41a)**. The original Greek word for *distracted* that Jesus uses is actually a word that can also be translated as *trouble*: *Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled by many things*.

You see, she forgot the most important thing. She forgot the thing that breathes life itself

into this world. She was so distracted by her busy and hectic life—so worried and trouble by the groove and rhythm and beat she created set for herself (a groove that wasn't very good to begin with), that her whole life was turned away from the most important truth in all of the universe—that all of this, everything good and true that we experience in this world, and everyone we encounter, no matter how annoying they are or not, are created out of the pure and perfect love of God, period! And in that moment in their house, there he was, the very source of that Love, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom the Gospel of John says that all things, even the annoying people, were created out of love through him. And somehow, someday, Mary saw it, she saw the love in his eyes, and his love for her, and she wanted more of it, and that's exactly what Jesus told Martha: **“Martha, Martha , you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42).**

Church, we're not getting annoyed with others because of something they did, we're getting annoyed with others because we're not seeing the love of God, the love of Jesus Christ, right in front of us. He longs for us, like Mary, to yearn to sit at his feet, and bask in his love and grace, to not worry about this task or that, to not have our hearts troubled or worried by the actions of others, but to see that they too are a child of God!

The town I was pastoring in up in Minnesota was filled with many Somali Muslim refugees, and you better believe that annoyed a fair amount of people up there. With my background of being in ministry with Muslim peoples I would often be asked how deal with this influx of strangers (many times that was the exact wording that people would use with me, “how do we deal with them?”) And at the root of that question is much like what was at the

root of Martha's life the day Jesus visited her—there's fear and trouble and worry and distraction by all the unknowns in this world, and the fear that the media feeds us, and many times this fear lead to many, many people being greatly annoyed by this refugee presence in town. So, the best piece of advice I could give people was this: *next time you're at the grocery store and a Somali woman wearing a headscarf is working the checkout line, don't try to avoid it, don't go to the other line, but get in her line, and when she looks at you and asks you how your day is, look at her, look at the child of God that she is, look her in the eyes, and with the most loving smile you can muster, say hi and ask her how her day was too! You may be the very first, and only Christian that day to do just that!*

And that's the new groove we need to practice this week, and work into our daily lives. We need to practice the groove that Mary had, not the groove that Martha had. We're already way too good at Martha's groove of being distracted and troubled and worried and troubled at every little thing. Instead, we need to practice Mary's groove of love, of sitting before the love of Christ, basking in it's warmth, and seeing others the way he does, just as Martha needed to see Mary the way Jesus did. Not in annoyance, but with love. So, **When the actions of others get under your skin, / Look into their face, and see the love God has for them.** Every time someone annoys you, every action that irks you, every situation that rubs you the wrong way, look at them as a person, look at them as a child of God, look at that totally annoying person in front of you, and love them with the love of God. *That's* a groove that can change your life, it could change their life, and imagine if that's the groove the whole church lived by... it could change everything!