

July 17, 2022

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

The readings today are classic texts. They are familiar. We recognize the characters, flow of the story, the outcome, and probably even a usual message we associate with it, or a moral to the story.

Genesis—Abraham & Sarah, in the desert as usual, meet 3 travelers and welcome them in with hospitality typical of both God's people and 1<sup>st</sup> century desert culture.

Psalms—Perhaps not so familiar and not a story, but it is straightforward in asking the question "Who can be in God's holy place?" followed by traits describing the type of person.

Colossians—Again, not so much a story as it's Paul writing and he likes his words, but full of all the familiar statements and truths we believe about Jesus: in charge of all things, creator of all, reconciling everything in heaven & earth.

Luke—Jesus visits Martha's house, Martha prepares everything while Mary sits with Jesus, sibling rivalry flairs up, Jesus reminds everyone to not be so busy that they miss the forest for the trees.

With such familiar passages, it's tempting to gloss over and not read them closely.

Can we slow down and focus, listening carefully for God's message to us?

Do we pause long enough to let God get a word in to us?

Do we give the passages a second thought since we already know the ending and the moral of the story?

Perhaps today, for the next few minutes, we can slow down, focus, and open our ears to God's message for us in these stories.

The Genesis story is filled with messages of kindness, hospitality and welcoming strangers that easily stand out. These are all great messages that each of us can take to heart.

With how divided and negative our society is currently, we can all use some practice to improve on kindness and hospitality. But what about the less obvious parts of the story?

The passage is very brief and compressed to just the main elements of the story. If we take the story a bit slower, we're led to fill in with our imagination all of the work done by Sarah

to grind the grain into flour, mix it with seasonings & oil, and then stoking the fire to cook the cakes.

There's also the work of the servant to clean the skin & fat from the calf, to roast it, and to serve it to the travelers.

Many steps and events took place in the few words of "make some cakes" and asking the servant to prepare the calf.

How often do we do the same to speed up and compress life?

Like the commercials for your favorite streaming service or television provider, where the people are rushing to finish the current episode to then fast forward through the credits to get to the next episode of their show. Hurry, hurry.

Or perhaps we're at a party or restaurant where the food shows up magically.

Do we take a moment to realize all of the unseen things that happened beforehand?

We might remember to say a word of thanks before we eat, but do our thoughts stretch to the farmers, seeds, favorable weather, harvesters, transporters, grocery stores, chefs, or servers that led up to our delicious meal?

Do we pause to recognize and be grateful for the unseen events?

Or are we like Abraham & the 3 travelers who seem to arrive and food simply appears—are we still on the fast forward version of this story or are we trying to slow down as our saying goes “to stop and smell the roses.”

This last year at the high school where I teach, Administration wanted to do a gratitude initiative with the students to help them gain awareness of the unseen people around them who contribute to their education.

Each quarter, teenagers wrote and mailed thank you cards to parents, coaches/teachers, donors to the school, or another non-parent family member.

Pausing to be grateful for the unseen offers you a new perspective on life as God sees it and is an easy way to deepen or kickstart your prayer life. It’s a simple practice to fulfill the verse in I Thessalonians 5:17 “pray without ceasing.” Maybe a good challenge to take with you into the rest of your week.

Our human culture and society are so geared towards consuming and hurrying through everything. I noticed this happening as a kid and now it seems even more advanced and expedited. I find myself wondering:

Why’s everyone in such a hurry?

Where are we all racing off to?

Why are we so eager to sacrifice the present for the next thing?

Perhaps some of these same questions were in Jesus’ mind as Martha hurried to prepare the meal she invited Jesus to.

If you’ve ever been responsible for planning and executing a get-together like Sarah or Martha, you know the intensity of the pressure and stress to have all the pieces of an event come together at the right time and to the enjoyment of your guests.

Whenever I read this story, I’m right there with Martha—“I need some help here! This is hard work and there’s still so much to do while y’all lounge around chatting and relaxing.”

But I’m right there with Jesus too—“Woah! What’s the rush? There’s time to finish preparing after we chat and share God’s Word.” It’s a tension between the two sides/aspects.

Both the preparing and the chatting matter and are important,  
but Jesus is pretty specific that God’s Word takes a winning edge.

Word followed by service. Listening and then action.

In the most basic sense, it’s hard to do a task well if you don’t know how to do it. Hence the instructions right?

How many sitcoms have shared the humor with us over the years of a couple people trying to build a bookshelf or bed frame who don’t read the instructions

and end up with some haphazard, collapsing object that makes no sense and definitely doesn’t work as a bookshelf or bed frame?

It’s funny watching it happen to someone else, but not so much when we recognize it happening to us.

We live out the same story as Martha and Mary. We're always caught between listening and action. The truth is, it's not an either/or scenario.

We can't be Mary OR Martha. We have to be both of them at the same time. We need listening AND action, Word AND Service.

Which is exactly why our Sunday worship is designed with the story first and the meal second. The wine & bread don't make sense without listening to the story, the Word first.

We humans need our ears and hearts tuned to God's grace from the Word before eating or doing anything makes sense.

To borrow from our Colossians passage today:

"Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; in him all things in heaven and on earth were created...through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the church, the beginning. In him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God reconciled all things in heaven and on earth to himself."

It's Jesus who ties everything together.

We hear it echoed every winter in Advent from John 1:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup> in him was life,<sup>[a]</sup> and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,<sup>[d]</sup> full of grace and truth."

It's Jesus who weaves the details of life into a complete quilt and tapestry that makes sense. The one in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

The one who reminds us that the unseen details of each person's life are valued and precious.

The one who reminds us to listen to the Word so we are prepared to serve.

We've spent our time listening at Jesus' feet and allowed the Word to dwell in us richly. So now let us move to the action and service where we feast upon the bread and wine, the body and blood. Let us join at the Lord's table to receive God's promise of forgiveness and new life to sustain us today and every day. Amen.

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## Readings

Genesis 18:1-10a

Psalm 15 (1)

Colossians 1:15-28

Luke 10:38-42

## Prayer of the Day

Eternal God, you draw near to us in Christ, and you make yourself our guest. Amid the cares of our lives, make us attentive to your presence, that we may treasure your word above all else, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord