

July 15. 2018 The Guest Pt. 4 Luke 10:38-42

The opening verse of this portion of Luke lays out the fundamentals of what is occurring. “As Jesus and HIS disciples were on their way...” I am tempted to quote the country star Willie Nelson. He wrote a song which has become his signature piece. “On the road again.” The Greek word which is translated “way” in the sentence, “Jesus and HIS disciples were on their way” is also the word for road. Jesus is in Galilee, and HE and HIS disciples are walking from village to village doing what Jesus does. HE teaches and HE heals.

One of the things we learned in Israel back in 2015 is that one of the characteristics of a small nation, is that villages, towns and cities are not far apart. My parents spent little time travelling. Money was always tight. Travel was expensive. And one of the reasons travel seemed to be so expensive is that from Port Arthur, the nearest centre of significant size going east was Sault St. Marie. It was a distance of 450 miles east. Going west Winnipeg Manitoba was the closest city. Approximately 500 miles to the northwest. Distance has always made travel in Canada difficult, or time consuming, or expensive.

In Israel it is a different reality. The nation is smaller than a quarter of the province of Ontario. Communities are within walking distance, if you have the time and the energy. Clearly Jesus had both. And the Spirit of God had infused HIM

with a sense of urgency. HE had so much to do, and so little time. So he is literally on the road again.

He arrives at this village where Martha opened her home to Jesus and those who were with HIM. It was not a small commitment to do so. The homes were tiny, consisting of one or two rooms. Jesus seems to go nowhere by HIMSELF. At a minimum there is the ever present twelve disciples. Often that term “disciples” swells to a crowd of up to 120 people. I mention that, because Martha obviously (whatever the number was on this occasion) has her hands and her home full of people.

Opening her home to Jesus means she is by default the host of the gathering that occurs, and it is a gathering to which Jesus ministers. Jesus teaches. People come to hear what HE is saying. They come to see what is happening because the news of healings and cleansings, has preceded HIM. And no doubt...it has increased the numbers of people who are suddenly at Martha’s place, in her home, and for whom she feels a measure of responsibility because she is aware...whatever she does or does not do, will reflect on Jesus name, as well as her own.

And Martha has a problem. When she decided to open her home to Jesus and HIS entourage, and the people who gather to hear HIM, and the people who gather to see HIM and the people who come...to watch HIM; clearly she assumed that she would not be doing everything on her own. She

assumed her sister Mary would help her out in the preparations department. Hospitality, then as now, takes time. And Mary has not joined Martha in the kitchen! In fact she has taken a front row seat, at the very feet of Jesus, where she is drinking in every word and hanging on every thought that Jesus shares.

In short, Martha is starting to do a slow burn as she labours to make all the preparations by herself. The honour and the privilege has become a burden. Burden with a capital B. Her concern is genuine. She is now saddled with a house full of company. Clearly they are going to expect her to feed them, to quench their thirst, and God knows how long this “event”... because that is what it has become...an event...how long will it go on...and who else is going to arrive and expect Martha to provide place and room and food and drink? Finally, she cannot stand the pressure any more. She makes her way through the crowd to Jesus. This is her house! She has to pick her way through and around the members of the crowd. And she unloads her burdens on Jesus.

“Lord!” She interrupts. She brings everything to a halt. She asks the question that is burning in her heart and filling her mind. “Don’t you care about me? Don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me!” Martha did not say it but by implication she is declaring....this is unfair!!

If there is a surprise in this situation it is the calm exhibited by our Lord. HE is not unaware of her, or of what she

has been doing. HE knows her name. Jesus quietly uses it twice. "Martha, Martha." And HE goes on to say, "You are upset and worried about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." I tell you, I suspect there was a conversation later between Mary and Martha that I am glad I was not present for. You know what I mean?

And yet, there is a huge lesson here. And that lesson needs to be heard by all of us, including me. You have no idea how we in church leadership fuss and fume over the work of preparation for events in the church. And I am not just talking about social events. In the summer time, I become a watcher of the weather channel from Wednesday on in the week. Are we going to be upstairs or downstairs. What if this happens? What if that happens? What will we do to get the books in place? What if the sound system is not set up? The list of what ifs can be very very long... if you give it the time and energy it does not deserve. You would be amazed at what a character like me can invent to worry about.

Morley, Morley! You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Only one thing is necessary. Mary and Martha and Morley know who Jesus is. He is not a stranger to them, or to me, nor are we strangers to HIM. One thing is needful. And that one thing is to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to what HE says in order that we might do what we do in accordance with what we learn about HIS

desires for us. One commentator has simply written that what Jesus wants is that Marthas be changed into Marys.

And you know what (Lord forgive me) the first thought that went through my mind was when I read that? And if that happens who is going to do all the work that needs doing? Which misses or even worse, dismisses the whole point that Jesus was making. What does the Lord want more than anything else from us? He wants our love. He wants our affection. If our hearts are in the right place...the needful work will not only get done, it will get done cheerfully. "The Lord loves a cheerful giver." To put it another way? The Lord desires that we appreciate HIS grace toward us, more than that we pile up achievement list of things accomplished. Especially if that leads us into the storm of resentment over the fact that we "had to do" what was done.

Jesus drew two lines in the sand. The first line is a refusal to praise Martha's attitude. I take this personally. I am rebuked for my "worrying" over things that can go wrong, that never do. I burn an awful lot of anxiety, over things that never occur. The "what ifs" of life. At the same time, Jesus words do not mean that planning and diligence are unimportant. It would be wrong to interpret Jesus words as meaning hospitality is unimportant.

There can be no doubt that Jesus liked Mary's focus. She wants to learn from Jesus in order to be like Him. That is what Jesus affirms will never be taken away from her. She is

Mary of Bethany. She anoints Jesus with very valuable perfume days before the crucifixion. There is a connection between that devotion and her desire to learn at the feet of her Master.

Let us pray;

Lord I sometimes fear there is more of Martha in me than Mary. Help us all to get that balance right. Help us to see clearly when we should sweat and get our hands dirty for the Kingdom of God. Also help us to discern when our greatest need is to be still, seeking your word, your Spirit's direction, that we might always serve YOU best and first. Amen

