

July 21, 2019

"Mission Distractions: Anxiety and Concern"

Luke 10: 38 - 42

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How do you know you are distracted in your life, unable to focus on what keeps you going? How do you know you are more fearful or anxious than usual?

God has a mission in these days, here in Orleans, and across the planet. Relationship with Jesus is that mission. So we keep asking if you have given yourself to Him, confessed your sins, and are ready and willing to serve, even during the Summer. It starts with your decision(s), it continues with your decisions, and the grace of God, day by day.

There's a beautiful moment in the Scriptures where Jesus hangs with his close friends Mary and Martha. Now we know from John 11: 17-45, that both Mary and Martha are strong believers and followers of Jesus. This passage is not about one being religious and the other being a true believer. No, this passage is about the Mission, just like the rest of chapter 10 of Dr. Luke's gospel.

So what is Luke trying to tell us about the Mission? He is warning us of several things that can happen and He is also commending time with Him. Did you know that time is your most precious possession? Spending time with Jesus, in Scripture, in acknowledging his presence, in speaking with Him, in knowing the intimacy of His voice and His touch is so key to everything else that we do, that we call church, in worship, in prayer, in committees, in leadership, in outreach, in compassionate times with the community, with the homeless, with students, at Gracefest, with what's happening in the denomination, and here in the congregation, everything. Time with Jesus can be eaten up by every other activity, entertainment, relationship, thought...so make time for Him. In the morning, if you are a morning person, in the evening if you are more alert then, know your own personal, internal state and invite him right there, now, today. Timing is everything. Soon, time will be no more. You and I will have made our time choices, and face the Lord with those choices.

Now back to that short passage in Luke, where Jesus gets invited into this home. I'm not sure where Lazarus, the brother of these two sisters is, but he was there too, possibly as in John 11. Nevertheless, this passage is not against hospitality and cooking meals for guests. In fact, I think we are losing that one time major way of inviting people into the church, through individual homes. It's been going on for centuries. You invite someone to

your home and they see that you have a relationship with Jesus. That's how they come to get to know Jesus. In part, they come to know Jesus because you were kind enough to invite them in. It's not about whether they are hungry or needy, because we all are. It's about loving people with our home spaces. It used to be that people would invite other people regularly to their homes for a meal.

Now it seems restaurants and other places have taken the place of opening our homes.

I know it can be hard to entertain, or simply make a meal for others, but that is the space we help others see what we have. And maybe it's hard because we don't want others to see what's happening in our homes, if there is disruption or crisis, or difficulties of many kinds. I get that too.

But that's the place we can share space with the Lord. And don't get me wrong, we can share in a restaurant too, or some other public place, but I am simply reflecting on the Scripture "a woman named Martha opened her home to Jesus" (Luke 10:38).

How can we do this for one another again in these days? I hope leadership will take this call from Scripture seriously, as we need to spend time with one another and others. Our leaders, and all of us have to re-evaluate our time issues, and ask if we have enough time for church, enough time for the Mission. Let's be honest: the time issue comes up again and it seems that only severe illness or some other critical issue slows us down, makes us make time. Have you found this to be true in your life?

So we are in Martha's home with Jesus. Mary is there too. We know the story. We have been in this home many times. What's the problem? What's Jesus encouraging? What's the warning for us all?

The problem appears to be Martha's trying to make the supper perfect and whatever other activities or events, perhaps the kitchen party, if we were in Atlantic Canada. All the details are weighing on Martha and she wants her sister to help. Martha is very reasonable, right? But then Jesus speaks into the situation. He analyzes it and it doesn't quite come out the way Martha sees it.

He tells Martha what? You are worried and upset about many things. Let's talk about that. I know I'm worried and anxious often. How about you? I worry about my family, our congregation, our denomination, our country, retirement, employment...you name it. I would like to tell you that I am worry free, but that wouldn't be very honest. What does worry and anxiety do to me? How about you? Medicine net says:
https://www.medicinenet.com/anxiety/article.htm#what_is_anxiety

Anxiety can be described as the response to a future or possible threat. Anxiety is closely related to fear, which is the response to a real or perceived immediate threat. Fear and anxiety are normal evolved responses in both humans and animals, and physical responses are linked to the "fight-or-flight" system. The autonomic nervous system controls the fight-or-flight response in the body, and this response generally includes dilation of the pupils in the eyes, increased heart rate, and increased respiration/breathing. Anxiety responses can include increased vigilance (paying attention to one's surroundings) and muscle tension. Anxiety can be constructive, such as improving performance on a test, sporting event, or public speaking. Although these are normal responses and often helpful responses to danger, anxiety can cause problems when it is turned on too easily, not turned off when danger is absent, or when the response is too strong. Excessive anxiety that causes distress or impairment, that interferes with normal function, or causes avoidance of important activities and people in life, is considered an anxiety disorder.

Everybody experiences anxiety. So what is Jesus warning against? He certainly is not warning against hospitality and making meals in your home. He certainly is not telling Martha she shouldn't have invited him in. He is saying He won't be correcting her sister. He is saying He is concerned at Martha's distraction from the most important things happening in her home at that moment.

It is the distraction in our lives that Jesus wants to address. This brings us to the topic of Beelzebub or Beelzebul (see Matthew 12: 24, Mark 3:22, Luke 11: 15-19). Jesus had been accused of casting out demons by the power of this pagan god, also known as a lord over demons, Lord of the flies, or, Lord of dung (poop). What does this have to do with Jesus in Martha's home? Martha is distracted. One of the main ways the devil and his forces have to defeat us in our spiritual life is by distraction. We don't have time for spiritual things, because of everything else we give priority to. It's kind of like when you get a big housefly in your room or kitchen, or fruit flies. They drive you to distraction. It is hard to concentrate on anything else. The same happens when I am camping, which is not my favorite activity. The mosquitoes, horse flies, black flies, deer flies, you name it, love to hover and buzz in my ears, then take bites out of me. It's not because I am so sweet, but I am dinner. I can imagine hell on earth for me being the high whine of a mosquito in my ear, that cannot be shooed away or killed.

How about you? What distracts you from the enjoyment of the outdoors, or the life's work you are called to do? What

distracts you from your Mission for the Saviour, your Master? Beelzebub comes and wastes your time on stuff that will not last, like the flies drawn to dung, to poop of many kinds. What is the poop in your life that the devil is using to distract you from deeper relationship with Jesus? Is there something Jesus wants to say to you about your time and your distractions?

I often go to video distractions, TV and movies. What do you do?

Jesus wants us to develop that sitting at his feet, which is not so much the posture, but the attitude of time and concentration to hear what He has to say. Mary was choosing that. Jesus was commending that.

When we are upset and angry and frustrated, it is often quite normal. Martha was like that because things weren't going in her home the way she wanted them to be going and her sister wasn't even helping. But in this state of mind, we need to get back to that place where we can talk in reasonable tone to those who are helping us be that way. Being upset is normal. What we do with being upset is the part we need to bring to God. Lord, help me listen and not speak. Help me have more patience than I currently have in this situation. These are important prayers. Help me speak to this person the way I want to be spoken to. Help me hear this person the way I want to be heard.

Only one thing is needed, the Scripture says in Luke 10:42. Or perhaps the text is saying only a few things are needed, as the textual variant describes. In either case, Jesus brings us back to our relationship with Him as critical to our relationship to one another. Our mission depends on Him. Our relationships to one another depend on Him. Our being any kind of witness to the faith depends on our relationship to Him and one another.

Mary had figured out in this instance that giving herself to Jesus and what He says comes first, or should come first. This does not excuse irresponsible behaviour, nor should we think that saying we are praying or spending time with Jesus takes away all our other responsibilities. But it is key in our times together, and more important than our coffee times or meals (did I say that?) or our other activities. (We do love to eat...)

And if you are overwhelmed with anxiety, fears or phobias, obsessions (thinking you can't stop) and compulsions (behaviours you can't stop), please take the first step and admit to yourself and someone you love or care about, that such is the reality in your life. Then seek professional help, counsel, perhaps even specialized or psychiatric help. There are many kinds of help available here in this city and area. There are many kinds of counseling that respects Christian values and Scripture. Please don't put off those parts of your life that might be distracting

your spiritual life to the point of making it useless or unprofitable.

The Lord cares about what you are going through. He cares about you just the way you are. He wants to draw you closer to Himself. In that place, you will experience the life that fulfills, the life that is a taste of heaven in advance. That is where others will see the Mission in you. They will see that Jesus has made a difference in your life.

Don't be distracted by the flies. Remember how small a part of your life they are. Recommit yourself to the Mission. Trust Jesus anew with some significant time this Summer.

Let us pray.