

If Mary, of the legendary Mary, Martha, and Lazarus trio of family faithfulness, wrote a book about her experiences, she might have titled it the Aramaic equivalent of “Look to the Source.” I say this because she is the visionary, the one who taps into the Christ component of the Jesus Chronicles. And, who knows, maybe she did; I personally think she and brother Lazarus are the authors of the Fourth Gospel, otherwise known as John. But, the patriarchy of the teen years of the Church didn’t like to acknowledge the public role of women... ‘Auwe!

Any preacher bold enough to talk about this scenario risks alienating the Martha figures of every congregation which has ever existed, the ones (female or male) who keep food on the table and make certain toilet paper and soap are in the lua. Clearly, this passage is not about “dissing” Martha and all her apprentices.

As I mentioned last Sunday, I often use lectionary suggestions from the Hebrew Scriptures, as they lend additional pertinence to the topic of the day, and from a more ancient perspective. The Amos reading, from Chapter 8, contains the ongoing polemic against the theocratic society in the Northern Kingdom; the corruption of the 1% and mistreatment of the poor in a rigged system are condemned. Amos is writing a few hundred years before a similar lament is penned by Confucius, who states: *To be wealthy and honored in an unjust society is a disgrace.* Thankfully, we know nothing about that these days.

However, I’d like to offer this scenario from Genesis 18; you’ll remember it....

Abraham, Sarah, Mary, and Martha are all in the hospitality mode. We glimpse the desert-style of welcoming strangers in Abraham’s actions. It is a real thing. So long as folks have not been abused or are otherwise fearful, it was and is common to welcome strangers, “aliens in the land,” simply because human kindness matters in a hostile environment. Does Abraham see the Source of these travelers? Does he recognize their angelic nature? No matter; they get the proverbial red carpet treatment, offering, in turn, a promise regarding the question of progeny....

Martha, while she holds Jesus in high regard, plays the role of Sarah in the tent. However, Martha is not hidden away; she is present, and vocal. Her lament is understandable; most of us have shared it: Who ordered the poi? Was supposed to be delivered already! Where is the help? Who will set up those chairs properly? How can we be ready for our guests? Who will help clean up? It all goes with hospitality, a value with strong roots and branches.

Yet we've all known folks who cannot stop organizing, preparing, serving, and cleaning in order to have conversation. Sometimes, among church groups, having things catered—I know, scandalous—frees the Marthas for more interaction, insofar as they are willing. Sometimes we hide behind our “doing.” As was pointed out in the Stillspeaking devotional today, “Jesus is calling us out of our comfort zones to receive, in company, what we cannot receive alone.”

Jesus does not dismiss Martha's sensibilities, he simply affirms Mary's choice.

It is tricky business, this desire to include everybody.

Now, back to Mary's attention on the guest. He is by then a friend and a frequent visitor, it seems. She knows Jesus is not another hand at the Bridge table; nor is he someone who stops by with his guy friends with a bag of fresh fish. His presence and actions have provided a new understanding of life for her; she is to be forever changed because of the depth of the relationship. It has been a God Thing. She is learning to turn to the Source of all being in a way not previously understood. And she takes herself seriously enough to do so, even if it irritates her sibling (and others in her sphere). Mary's is a political act; she breaks out of her traditional gender role in order to align with a higher authority.

Participating in a community of faith is, at best, a political act because, like the first believers, we recognize that, if Jesus is Sovereign, Caesar is not, Wall Street is not, our rigged socioeconomic system is not, the Military/Industrial/Congressional Complex is not. Only God, in unfathomable Presence, is Sovereign. And God, further, invites us to be hospitable to one another, and the earth; to espouse and act upon the values that sustain us, especially when the outcome is uncertain. Going to church is a political act because it sets us apart from systems of greed, oppression, and violence. So, even though we cannot tell anyone for whom to vote, (as I reminded a dynamic parishioner this past week) we are mandated to speak the truth in love over against the Powers. We look to the Source for wisdom and insight; then we take those convictions into the streets of daily sojourning.

During the time of interim ministry, the congregation has a unique opportunity for reinvention, for clarifying mission and program, organization and strengths, as assisted (read: questioned, prodded, encouraged, challenged, affirmed) by an outsider, one who has approached your “tent,” not as Source but pointing to Source as reason for and Ground of Being. You will sit with me and tell me your stories, and the stories of this history-rich community of faith. And we will grow together in aloha and mana’o toward greater empowerment of you all in this sacred task.

Writing in the “Living the Word” section of the current *Christian Century*, Michael Fick says, *Christ, bearing the fullness of the mystery of God in human flesh, enters into the midst of our various households and embodies the holiness of both giving and receiving hospitality....Jesus both anoints and is anointed, washes and is washed. Jesus both serves the disciples and empowers, even demands, their service....Worry and distraction are the enemies of both meaningful action and attentive relationship. Perhaps this is where individuals and communities, churches and even denominations, can begin to sit at the feet of Christ and discern. By naming the worries and distractions that possess us, we can hope for the grace and freedom to receive and share Christ’s hospitality in ways that transform us and invite the world into transformation.* (p.20)

It is about perseverance, confidence, audacity in finding one’s own voice, willingness to open ourselves to the ultimate form of hospitality—the love of Jesus. And the work will not be complete in our time. Nevertheless...

Similar to Oscar Romero’s reflection I shared last week is this from The Talmud: *Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief, Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.*

Makaukau?