

## ***SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST***

*Amos 8:1-12; Psalm 52; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42*

Jesus had special friends. Among them were Mary and Martha of Bethany and their brother Lazarus.

The story of Mary and Martha and their encounter with Jesus is very familiar and much loved. Mary wanted to know about Jesus, to get to know Him and to learn from Him. While she was doing this, Martha was left with the household chores, including hospitality to this journeying teacher who had arrived on their doorstep. We can imagine Martha preparing the bedroom, fussing in the kitchen, grumbling and mumbling to herself that she has to do all the work while her sister plays up to their famous guest. Finally Martha can bear it no longer.

Imagine her bursting onto the scene to the surprise of Jesus and her sister, and then letting loose her resentment about her sister's laziness to Jesus, not caring what impression she was making.

This is not an unfamiliar scene. We've probably all been scolded for neglecting our duties, by a partner, or parent, or child. What is odd is the reply Jesus gives to the angry 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".

Some years before the careful historian, St. Luke, wrote this account, St. Paul wrote to the new church in Philippi telling them, "The Lord is near; do not be anxious, but in everything make your requests known to God in prayer and petition with

thanksgiving. Then the peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus”.

Some of us may well be thinking by now “easier said than done.” It is so easy for us to assign the difficult parts of faith to that section of our memory where we store unusual ideas and strange phenomenon; things we don’t think we will experience in everyday life. We follow Martha.

“You are worried and distracted by many things”. Aren’t we all? Certainly life is a good deal more complicated than it was two thousand years ago. Computers and the Internet open up to the members of our families a world of disagreement and a multitude of influences, many of which leave us feeling distracted and lost. Mary’s answer, to go and spend time getting to know Jesus, listening to Jesus and learning from Jesus, seems suspiciously simple, particularly to Anglicans. After all, we fancy that we are sophisticated, educated, and in the know about most things.

Consider the way that St. Paul fleshes out the “don’t worry” advice Jesus gives to Martha. “Do not be anxious,” he writes to Christians who are misunderstood, criticized, and even persecuted for their faith. He writes to men and women who try to work out practical ways of living the faith in a hostile world, among, for the most part, gentiles, to whom religion is rather like crossing one’s fingers or not walking under ladders.

Worshiping a multitude of gods who play with humans and are unreliable guides at best, the neighbors of the Christian community in Philippi looked rather oddly at these members of a Jewish sect who believed in a moral God, a faithful God, and a redeeming God.

Neither Jesus nor St. Paul advised worried people to make the

sign against the evil eye, cross their fingers, or avoid walking under ladders. Jesus tells Martha that she has things backwards.

Mary has the better part because she first goes to Jesus. St. Paul reminds the Philippian Christians that “The Lord is near.” It means the same. If together our hearts are fixed where true joy is to be found, if “we make our requests known to God in prayer and petition with thanksgiving,” the peace of God will be ours. An old revival hymn tells us to “Take it to the Lord in prayer.” An old image that can be helpful is that we are to nail our hopes, joys, fears, and worries onto the cross, where they die to all that complicates them. Having died, behold they live anew.

This reference to the cross brings us to the “thanksgiving” St. Paul mentions. That word is the root of the word Eucharist. The Eucharist takes us in a time machine, backward, to the Upper Room, to Calvary, to the Empty Tomb and Resurrection, to the Ascension, and then forward to the end times when the nations of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord Christ. In other words, every time we join in the “thanksgiving,” we are reminded that God is in control and that God’s purposes are working out year after year. The Church and we, the people of God, are in God’s hands, in God’s purpose, and in God’s pleasure.

When we despair because of what happens in the church, in our parish, in our homes, in effect we “do a Martha.” We rush around in mind or body trying to get things done, trying to fix things, as if God has left it all up to us and retired! Instead we are called, with Mary of Bethany, to live “in” Christ, to get to know Him, as a church and individually; to learn from Jesus and to live in Jesus, in whose face we see God. We are to bring to God all we are, and all the complications of life, and begin there. Above all, in our thanksgiving, as we eat and drink with God,

we are to be renewed, to gain confidence, to live and love and rejoice, because underneath are the everlasting arms.

It is intentionally “practicing the presence of God” that we receive “the peace of God which passes all understanding.”

Our peace is not the absence of conflict, worry, or sickness.

Rather God’s peace enables us to “live and love” despite “the changes and chances of this fleeting world” as the old collect puts it. Mary was right!

**AMEN.**