

Summerland United Church
 July 20 Stepping Out: Sitting down to Step Up

Threshold and Christ Candle

We use the image of 'journey' a lot when we talk about our lives and our faith. We're on a spiritual path, we're walking the way of Jesus. We're being led, we're following – we feel like we always need to be on the go. When we pause to rest, to be rejuvenated, or to stop and listen, we can become impatient. There is so much to do and so little time.

As we continue to engage with the stories of Jesus stepping out his ministry beyond the walls of a building, we come to the story of Martha and Mary; the two women who embody this need to be constantly productive and the desire to pause and listen. Sometimes the best way to step up in ministry, step up in being brave is to first -sit down, pause and listen.

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:38-42

Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth, metaphor or story, listen for the meaning it has for you on this day.

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying.

But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, "Rabbi, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me."

But Jesus answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Reader: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflection

On occasion, this story of two sister is used as a story of oppression towards women. At first glance it appears that Jesus would prefer the women in his life to be silent, uncomplaining and working in the kitchen. And it's been used in this way for centuries. However, this interpretation couldn't be further from the truth.

This story, like the others we were considering during this series, takes place in a village house, outside any formal institution. It is a friendly and casual gathering. As we consider our call to ministry in Summerland, I'm drawn to these stories that happen

beyond the walls, friendly and casual – that seems to fit us here at Summerland United Church.

As we look at this particular story, it's important to notice that Jesus is welcomed by Martha. This very first line is an indicator that Martha, a woman is the head of this household. Only the head of the house would greet and welcome guests.

This means Martha is in a position of power, if Jesus had any problem with women in power, he would not have visited her house in this way. And yes, Martha is distracted and worried by many things. As a host, she wants her guests to feel welcome, to have food and drink, be comfortable. These are important things to her – they matter.

And she is frazzled by the fact she is serving and her sister appears to be too lazy to help her. The assumption is that the only thing Mary is doing, or will do, is sit at Jesus' feet and listen.

But perhaps this isn't the case. Perhaps Mary, after listening to Jesus, will get up and go help Martha serve their guests.

Jesus says to Martha that Mary has chosen the one thing that is needed, the better thing – to listen to the wisdom of God before engaging in service. Often women in the church find themselves in the position of being either a Mary or a Martha. I've even attended women's retreats where we've been asked to meditate on whether we're a Mary or a Martha. Which I find infuriating.

We don't have to choose and I don't think Jesus is asking us to choose – rather I think we are meant to be both. There are times when being a Martha is important, just as there are times when being a Mary is important.

For those of us who read Tyler Sit's book, *Staying Awake*, we read about the inward and outward transformation of self and church. We need to do both – we need to sit and listen and then be of service. And it cycles back and forth between the two.

Jesus, I believe, isn't admonishing Martha for waiting to be of service, or want help it, rather he's reminding her the value of being present to God in her life and taking time to be in that presence before setting to work serving God.

Suddenly this isn't a story oppressing woman, instead it's a story of Jesus encouraging women – and men – to recognize the need for God's presence in our all aspects of our lives. This is especially important when we are in service, in leadership, in ministry to others through our church work.

Since we've moved in to this new building we've been focusing on resting after the move, adjusting to these new spaces and our new roommates. Sunday worship series have been about reflecting on our Abundances and transforming those abundances into future ministry.

We have, I'll remind you, A Ministry Plan. This is a document to help guide our next few years. In writing this plan we were very intentional about give our community of faith a year to 'be a Mary' – sitting and listening at the feet of Jesus. Being in the presence of God and preparing our hearts and minds and spirits to be of further service to God and our Community.

We're getting close to the end of that year and it's time to start considering our role as 'a Martha': how we will serve. Within the Ministry Plan there are some ideas for investing in our future. However, before you get too anxious about this, let me just tell you, we're not going to do this alone.

There is much discerning and prayer and decisions to be made. We will, later this fall engage with a discernment facilitator who will help us figure out what our priorities are and as a community make decisions about next steps in our ministry. This will likely take the form of 1 or 2 day retreats for conversation, prayer, brainstorming, good food and fun. We don't have any dates just yet, but likely mid to late October.

We have a few printed copies of the Ministry Plan printed at the back, if you'd like a copy. It is also Linked in our weekly email – waaaaay down in the bottom.

For those of us who read 'How we learn to be brave' this summer, I am reminded of a line found on page 23: *Faithfulness isn't always about taking big leaps, but also walking with very small steps, and that's it possible to make a lasting difference in the world by tending to one small corner of it.*

This line has been one of the inspirations for our current theme because stepping our ministry beyond our walls can feel very daunting, however it doesn't need to be if we walk out with small steps with the intention of tending to one small corner. While keeping this in mind, we keep in mind as well the balance of being a Mary and a Martha – remembering to sit down and listen, and in this way we can stand up and step out. May it be so.