

SERMON
Time after Pentecost – Lectionary 16
July 18, 2010

Genesis 18:1-10a
Psalm 15
Colossians 1:15-28
Luke 10:38-42

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.

Some time ago, there was a movie that came out called, “City Slickers”. Perhaps some of you remember the movie. It was about three men – long time friends that were now approaching middle age.

Each year they would spend some vacation time together doing something that was in direct contrast to their button-down, complicated, driven, yuppie lifestyle that they lived fifty weeks out of the year.

The plot of the movie revolves around their decision to spend a vacation together going on a cattle drive, helping a bunch of seasoned cowboys move a herd of cattle across the big open plains of the West. Their hope was that, in the process, they might get in touch with their more primitive selves, and find out something useful about the meaning of life.

The boss of the cattle drive is a leathery old cowboy named Curly, who lives up to all of our stereotypes about cowboys. He’s mean and he’s tough. And he can do anything with a rope or a whip or a knife. But in his tough and rugged way, he’s also very wise.

In one of the more serious scenes of this comedy, Curly is riding alongside one of the city slickers, Mitch Robbins, who was played by actor Billy Crystal. Soon their conversation turns philosophical.

Against the backdrop of an open deep blue sky, dark gray jagged mountains, and clear bubbling streams, Mitch turns to Curly and says with longing, “Your life makes sense to you,” to which Curly replies; “You city folk. You worry a lot. How old are you? 38?”

“39”, replies Mitch.

“You all come up here about the same age. You spend fifty weeks getting knots in your rope and you think two weeks up here will untie them for you. None of you get it.” He pauses a minute and then continues, “You know what the secret to life is?”

“No, what?” says Mitch.

And then Curly says, “One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that, and everything else don’t mean nothin.” “That’s great,” says Mitch, “but what’s the one thing?”

Curly looks at him for a minute, and says, “That’s what you’ve got to figure out.”

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus stops in to visit a woman named Martha, and her sister Mary. As Martha was preoccupied with what we are told are “many tasks”, Mary sat at Jesus’ feet and was listening to what he was saying. This frustrated Martha, and she said to Jesus; “Lord, 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, “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.”

Can you just see Mary turning to Martha and saying; “See! Na na na na na na.”

There is need of only “one thing”, Jesus says. Of course, we, like Mitch in City Slickers, wonder what is this “one thing?” What is the “one thing” in our lives that rises above all else? What is the “one thing” that will make us whole – that will give us peace and contentment?

Well, let me tell you. Let me enlighten you as to what is the “one thing” in life that if we could just obtain, life would be perfect. Here it is... I don’t know. Jesus never told us. I wish I knew. I could write a best seller book and retire. But just because I don’t know doesn’t mean that I don’t have something to say about it.

There was a Major League Baseball umpire who once was quoted as saying; “I calls them how I sees them. And if I don’t sees them, I make it up.”

Well, I read commentary after commentary on this story about Jesus, and there was no real consensus. Therefore, I am going to share with you my thoughts on what is going on here. Again, they are my thoughts – my perspective, if you will.

You see, on the one hand, we could have the tendency to beat up on Martha. She’s just too busy DOING stuff and misses out on the more important thing of just BEING with Jesus, you know, like her sister Mary. Remember those two words, DOING and BEING.

Now, if we try and relate this story to our lives, we probably would have to confess that most of us are “doers”. How many “doers do we have here today? You know what I am talking about. Those of you who prepare a reception for the family after a funeral. Those of you who cut the grass, change the light bulbs, weed the flower beds, or clean the kitchen.

Those of you who set the altar for communion, sing in the choir, put together the bulletins or count the offerings. Those of you who teach Sunday School or volunteer for Vacation Bible School. Those of you who make quilts for the homeless, collect food for the poor, or mow the yard of a widow. Indeed, we have a lot of Martha’s sitting here this morning.

So are all of you missing the boat? Is Jesus saying that you are wasting your time? Perhaps you should quit “doing” all that stuff and just “be” with Jesus. I’m not serious of course, please don’t do that. For I think that if we interpret these words of Jesus in this way, we are missing the boat.

Remember our story last week. It comes just before today's reading in Luke's Gospel. It was the story of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan didn't just walk by the man lying in the ditch like the religious officials did so that they could "be" with God.

No, the Samaritan "did" something. And Jesus lifted him up in the story in a positive way. So therefore "doing" isn't always bad. Rather, it depends on the situation.

So let's take a look at Mary. Mary is just sitting there next to Jesus. She is reflecting on his words. Perhaps she is the dreamer, the visionary, contemplating what it means to sit at the feet of her Lord. Mary is just "being" with Jesus. So, how many "be-er's do we have here today? How many of you are Mary's?

Those of you who go and sit with the family members after the loss of a loved one. Those of you who come to hear the words of healing and wholeness at our healing services. Those of you who take walks through the park reflecting on the beauty of creation. Those of you who meditate on God's word. Indeed, I would guess that we also have some Mary's here this morning.

So where does this leave us? I believe that the message of Jesus here is that there is a time for "doing" and a time for "being". And that day, at the home of Martha and Mary, it wasn't a time for "doing", it was a time for "being". And if we are honest with ourselves, that is probably what most of us lack in our lives.

For our entire society places a higher value on "doing" as opposed to "being". If we are not "doing," we are said to be wasting time. And this is unfortunate. For there are so many things in life that we miss when we are constantly "doing".

For example, listen to this story. Brad and his family decided that they need to take a vacation. They need to get away for a while. He is ready to put away his calendar, turn off his cell phone, shut down his computer, and do something different.

However, without noticing it, the to-do list for his vacation grows to be as long as the to-do list back at the office. Read this novel, go to this museum, take this hike, eat at this restaurant, fix the boat, paint the cabin deck, catch up on reading trade journals and newspapers.

Then, one night, early on into their two week vacation, his little four-year-old daughter comes up to him and says, “Daddy, will you read me my stories tonight?” “Sure honey”, he says. So he stretches out on the bed next to her, and they read.

But because she’s tired, he knows that as soon as this last story is finished, he can get back to his novel and begin planning the events for the following day.

But here is what happens instead. When the last story is over, she says, “Daddy, will you just sit here until I fall asleep?” And so he does. He turns the light out and listens while she sings herself to sleep.

He listens to her voice fade quietly away. And then to her breathing. And then to the curtain rustling quietly as a soft breeze ushers cool night air into the room. And then to the holy sounds made by wonder itself.

At this moment, he is aware of the fullness of time. He knows what it is like to just “be”. And the keeping of time is not as important. And he is thankful.

I think that all of us need more of that kind of time – time of “being” rather than “doing”.

Brothers and sisters, God’s Kingdom comes to us in many ways, both through “doing” and “being”. For the truth is, is that both of these things have their time and place. And the challenge for you and me is to discern when to be a “doer”, and when to just “be”. I believe this is the “one thing” that Jesus is talking about.

So be watchful for the ways in which God’s Kingdom, even now, is breaking in around you. Stay alert to how it might be drawing near to you.

Perhaps it will be in the form of setting up beds and fixing meals for our homeless guests this week. Perhaps you will become aware of some injustice in our community or in our world that begs for your energy and passion.

Perhaps it could be some spiritual awakening which has put you in touch with a beating heart that you had forgotten you had.

Or perhaps you will encounter something of beauty that reminds you that the world is more, for sure, than just the collective ugliness that we see on the news every night.

Who knows what form it will take, this Kingdom of God that is ever drawing near and coming among us?

I would like to close with a quote from Rabbi Abraham Heschel. Rabbi Heschel writes; “Just to be is a blessing, just to live is holy.” “Just to be is a blessing, just to live is holy.” “Being” and “doing”, Mary and Martha; there is a time for both. Perhaps this is the “one thing.” Amen.

May the peace that passes all understanding be with you now and for life everlasting. Amen.