

Title: "The Heart of Cultivating a 3D Faith"

Text: Luke 10:38-42, I Corinthians 13

All Fall we have been looking together at the multiple dimensions of our lives of faith.

- We have been exploring how wide and long and high and deep the love of God is.
- And we have been seeking to know and experience that love by cultivating
  - the upward and inward and outward dimensions of our own lives of faith.

Today, I'd like to simply remind us that the heart of cultivating 3D faith life is simply slowing down to be with Jesus.

- Slowing down to be with Him so that we might
  - receive his great love
  - and allow it to transform us and flow through us into the world around us.

Turn with me to the Gospel of Luke today, Luke 10:38-42.

- A short passage that most of you have heard many times.
- It's Jesus and his disciples at the home of Mary and Martha.

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The season of Advent is a time of waiting in hope as we look forward to celebrating the coming of Christ at Christmas.

- But for most of us, Advent is not so much a time of waiting,
- as it is a time of rushing around trying to shop for presents,
    - get wrapping paper,
    - put up the Christmas tree, decorate the house,
      - stand in the freezing cold putting up the Christmas lights on the house, or on the trees and bushes outdoors.
  - We have Christmas cards to write, envelopes to stamp and address,
    - Christmas cookies to bake,
    - jobs at work that have to be completed by the end of the year.
  - Students have exams to take, teachers have exams they'll have to grade.
  - Advent for most of us is a time of stress.

We feel just like Martha, who was “worried and upset by many things.”

Anyone here feel “worried and upset by many things” as you approach Christmas and the end of the year?

And like Martha, quite often the things we are so worried and upset about aren't even the really bad things going on in the world that truly are upsetting.

Martha was worried and upset about trying to get a meal ready for 16 people.

-She was getting the meal ready for Jesus, whom she and her sister and brother Lazarus all loved dearly,

-and for his 12 disciples.

-So it wasn't a bad thing she was all in a tizzy about, but a good thing!

It's just that there was a lot to do to get the meal ready, and the table set for that many people, and nobody was helping!

-Naturally in that day, none of the guys were helping!

-But even her sister Mary was just sitting there at Jesus feet listening to him,

-and she wasn't doing anything to help get the meal on the table.

Isn't that just how we often feel as we're trying to get all the preparations for Christmas ready.

-It's a good thing we're getting ready for.

-In fact, like with Martha, it's a celebration for Jesus we're getting ready for. He's the “reason for the season.”

But in order to get ready, there's just all these things we feel have to get done.

-And the “To Do List” stresses us out.

-Like Martha we get worried and upset by all the many things we feel we have to do.

Trying to pick out just the right gift for certain people.

Trying to get the Christmas cards in the mail before New Years.

-Getting the tree up and decorated.

You know, it's all good stuff, it's just too much to do.

And the funny thing is,

- for Martha that day, and for us in Advent,
- it's supposed to be about welcoming Jesus into our homes and into our lives.

But in the midst of all we have to do, we sort of forget that.

-And we can miss Jesus all together.

And that day at Martha and Mary's house, Jesus said a pretty significant thing to Martha.

-He said, "Martha, only one thing is needed."

Only one thing.

And he said, "Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

You see, it was a good thing Martha was doing in getting the meal ready for everyone to eat.

-It's just that what Mary had chosen to do was a better thing.

It was the one thing that was really the appropriate thing to do when an honored guest was at your house:

-spend time with the guest.

And it is a pretty good reminder for us, that the one thing needed in the season of Advent, and at Christmas,

-is actually slowing down to spend time with Jesus.

It's really the one thing necessary for our lives.

1. In terms of this 3D faith life we have been seeking to cultivate,

- slowing down to be with Jesus is what enables the upward dimension of God's love to flow down into our lives.

Mary, sitting at Jesus' feet, was receiving Jesus' love that day in a way that Martha was too distracted to receive.

-It's not that Jesus loved Mary more than Martha.

-It was simply that Martha was too distracted by all she was doing for Jesus to actually receive the love Jesus had for her.

So somehow, having Jesus sitting right there in her living room did not result in Martha experiencing his love, or his peace, or his grace.

-She ended up being worried and upset instead.

-She ended up frustrated with her sister and resentful that she was having to do all the work herself.

-She ended up angry.

Have you ever spent the Christmas season frustrated and resentful and angry at your family?

-My friends, Jesus understands all of that, and he isn't scolding Martha here.

-But he is inviting her to set all the other stuff aside for a bit, to come and sit with Mary at his feet, too.

There's an implication here that Jesus is inviting Martha, and all of us to choose the better thing that Mary is doing.

"Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden," Jesus says, "and I will give you rest."

Saying yes to that invitation, and slowing down to spend time with Jesus enables that upward dimension of God's love to flow into us.

2. It also enables us to discern what is best for the other areas of our lives.

Slowing down to be in Jesus presence puts the rest of our lives into a different perspective.

-It gives us time to reflect on all we are doing and ask ourselves, "So what really is God wanting me to do today?"

Of all the good things I have on my "To Do List," what is really important, and why?

Or is there something that is not even on my "To Do List" that God has now had the opportunity to place on my heart, -and makes me rearrange my priorities for the day.

And sometimes I have found, that slowing down to be with Jesus gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to take things right off my "To Do List,"  
-because He convicts me that they are not things that I ought to be doing in the first place.

They are either not my job, or not what is really going to be helpful, or not a priority.

3. Slowing down to be with Jesus also enables us to hear God's word and listen to it.

This is what Mary was doing that day sitting at Jesus feet.  
-She was listening to him.

This is what Martha was too busy to be able to do.

Jesus invites us to spend time with him, and to read his Word  
-and to listen and pay attention to it.

Taking time to do this enables to participate with the Holy Spirit in our own inward transformation.

-Romans 12:2 says we are not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but rather be transformed by the renewing of our mind.

-This is what happens, slowly but surely, as we spend time sitting at Jesus feet on a regular basis listening to His word.

And if you wonder where to start if you sat down with a Bible and started to read,

-well, start right with this Gospel of Luke were reading from today.

-The beginning of the gospel will usher you right into Christmas with the story of Jesus' birth.

-And the rest of the Gospel will take you through his life.

Reading Luke's Gospel is a great way to spend some time sitting at Jesus' feet learning from him.

4. Spending time with Jesus also builds genuine community with others.

When the upward dimension of God's love flows down into our inner being and transforms us,  
-it always then affects the way we relate to the people around us.

We are not told what happened next in this story of Mary and Martha,  
-but if Martha had left the meal to bake in the oven on its own for 15-20 minutes,  
-and sat at Jesus' feet with Mary for a bit,  
-she might have had a much better time with her guests that day, not to mention with her sister.

She might have received the love and encouragement that Jesus had for her.  
-She might have tasted the bread of life that Mary had been receiving from Jesus,  
-and have forgiven her sister for wanting to sit at Jesus' feet and receive more of it.  
-She might have begun to enjoy having all of them in her home, and relaxed with them a bit.  
-She might have then gotten up a bit later and asked them all to help with the last preparations.

Peter and Andrew could have set the table.  
-James could have pulled the bread out of the oven, and sliced it up.  
-Mary could have shown John how to make a really good salad dressing with olive oil and balsamic vinegar, and some garlic, and just a pinch of sugar.  
-And Nathaniel could have poured the wine.

They could have all enjoyed getting the meal on the table, and enjoyed the eating of it.  
-Sitting in Jesus' presence fosters genuine community with others,  
-because the 'upward' love of God flows down into us and it transforms us, and transforms how we relate to others.

And you see, Martha could have been the beneficiary of all that.

- She could have discovered that all those people in her home actually loved her.
- She could have discovered that they were all actually willing to help.
- She could have discovered that they were truly thankful for all her preparations,
  - and that they wanted to be a blessing to her in return.

This is what I pray will be our experience this Christmas.

- May each of us in this busy season of Advent, hear Jesus saying to us,
  - “Paul, you are worried and stressed about many things.
    - But only one thing is needed.
    - Come sit with me for a while.
    - Rest in my presence. Abide with me.
      - Listen to my word.
      - Let my word abide in you.
    - Let me transform you by the renewing of your mind so that you might test and approve what my will for you is,
      - so that you might choose what is best and discover my good, pleasing, and perfect will for you.
- And so that you might enjoy a life of genuine community with your family, friends, and even strangers this Christmas season.
  - That will truly honor me for my birthday,” Jesus says.

Let us pray.