

## Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2019 10am

*Revd Val Reid – my last 10am communion here at Hinde Street*

### Luke 10: 38-42

Now as they went on their way, [Jesus] entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.

She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying.

But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, '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 the Lord answered her, '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.'

### Sermon

Last Sunday, in his regular column in the Daily Telegraph, Boris Johnson shared his views on a solution to our current mental health crisis.

Work.

Not that we are doing too much, or are under too much pressure, or are struggling with the gig economy, or are desperately searching for a job, or are forbidden to work because we are seeking refugee status....

No, his idea is that we can deal with depression by working harder.

According to Boris, Winston Churchill 'pitchforked off his depression' with work.

We can do the same, he suggests.

Because 'we derive our self-esteem from what we do.'

Well, of course, there is an element of truth in this.

Those of us who are lucky enough to have jobs that we love, jobs that seem to fulfil a sense of vocation, do indeed find them energising and empowering.

Sometimes.

Though we still overwork.

Get stressed.

Burn out.

But others are trapped in dead-end jobs, on zero-hours contracts, feeling de-skilled and de-valued.

Others are unable to work at all.

But whether we are a wannabe Prime Minister, or a Deliveroo driver, are we really defined by what we do? Is that where our identity lies?

In today's gospel reading, Jesus makes it very clear that the answer is no.

Martha rushes round in the kitchen –the Greek word is *peri-espato*.

The root of *espato* means to pull, to draw out, to breathe.

*Peri* is an intensifier.

Martha was pulled in so many different directions.

She was hyperventilating.

For her, work was not an identity.  
It was destroying her.

I first preached on the Martha and Mary story over 30 years ago.  
I had a two-year-old toddler, a new baby, and I rather identified with Martha.  
I spent my life rushing around, too much to do, resentful of those who didn't help.  
As a full-time mother and a part-time local preacher, I found it impossible to make space to prepare services and write sermons with the requisite amount of peace and quiet and attention.  
I knew what it was like to feel aggrieved by those, like Mary, who sat around indulging themselves with time to think, listen, have intelligent conversations with adults.

That toddler is now a 36-year-old.  
He is a history teacher, with his own home, and his own son.  
He knows what it's like to spend his life rushing around with too much to do.  
Not that I'm enjoying a moment of schadenfreude.  
Not at all.

But even though I live very differently now, I'm still a natural Martha.  
My to-do list is always too long.  
I find my energy in rushing from church to manse to meeting to visit to computer (yet another sermon to write).  
Yes – if I'm honest, I derive a good part of my self-esteem from being busy.  
And from mentioning it at key moments.  
Virtue-signalling, I'm ashamed to say.

So if I stop for a moment, and listen, I can hear the voice of Jesus directed to me.  
*Val, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing.*

And what is that one thing?

Today is the last time I will preside at the 10am communion service here at Hinde Street.  
For the last eight years, this has become a very precious part of my life.  
When I was first told that the Eucharist was celebrated here using the 1936 liturgy, I couldn't quite believe it.  
Really?  
In the 21<sup>st</sup> century?  
Then, as week by week I shared in this service, I came to understand why it was so well loved by those who attend.

It is quiet.  
We reflect together on this week's lectionary reading.  
We pray together.  
We relish the beautiful language of the Book of Common Prayer.  
As amended by John Wesley.  
And Kath Humphreys.

But most of all, we come to this table trusting in God's mercy, and not in any goodness of our own.

Martha welcomed Jesus into her home.

Hospitality, welcome, is hugely significant in Middle Eastern culture.

Martha did the right thing.

But then she did the wrong thing.

She got so hyped up with the cooking, that she lost sight of the point of it all.

Being in the presence of her guest.

Mary understood that.

Mary chose the better part.

When we come to this table, Jesus is the host.

We are welcomed to this place, as guests.

We are welcomed into his presence.

We are invited to share the feast.

Nothing we need to do.

Nothing we need to promise.

Nothing we need to say.

(Though somehow, we do seem to say an awful lot of words in this liturgy.)

We are just here.

In the presence of God.

Back when the Book of Common Prayer was written, the doctrine of Real Presence became a cause of great controversy.

Was Christ actually present in this bread?

This wine?

Or was it just symbolic?

Or were we just remembering?

I think that argument misses the point.

Real presence is mutual.

I am really here – paying attention, putting aside all the worries and needs and tasks that will preoccupy me when I get back to my desk.

And God is really here – in these ordinary, everyday elements.

The things of earth which will become for us the things of heaven.

This quiet eucharist at the start of the day, which we share week by week, is a Mary moment in our lives.

Stop hyperventilating.

Stop being pulled apart by all the things that distract you.

However good they might be in themselves.

And offer this half hour to God.

At our meditation group on Tuesday, I shared a reflection on the theology of Julian of Norwich written by Richard Rohr.

Contemplating her vision of the hazelnut, he suggested that 'how we do anything is how we do everything.'

It made us all think.

But I believe that this eucharistic feast is a regular reminder that how we do anything is how we do everything.

Can we pause, take a deep breath, remember that God is here?

Can we offer ourselves to be entirely present to the God who waits, patiently for our attention?

Can we, at the moment when we take the bread and wine, lay aside our protective blanket of words, and face the physicality of '*Take, eat, this is my body*'?

Can we make space for God in our very selves?

How we do anything is how we do everything.

This communion invites us to get in touch with our inner Mary.

And to live out of that place.

That is where we find our identity.

Our presence in God.

And God in us.

Amen.