

Bruton Parish Church  
The Rev. Ronald P. Jaynes, Interim Rector  
Proper 11 – Sunday, July 18, 2010

Hospitality is our theme this morning. It continues the theme of Luke's well loved story of the Good Samaritan.

Today we are in the home of Mary and her sister Martha .... 'Our Lady of Perpetual Triangulation' as Susan Russell so aptly names her. Who in this famous story is offering hospitality?

Martha is certain of the answer to that question, as she rushes around getting a meal prepared. And just as importantly she knows, I mean KNOWS that that dreamy-eyed sister of hers is NOT offering hospitality – as she sits there at Jesus' feet, as if that were any place for a woman to be in the first place ... and she wants Jesus to tell her so!

Martha was, writes Luke, distracted, drawn away by her many tasks. This was not a woman who was going about the job of getting a meal for the Teacher with quiet joy. No indeed; she bursts into the room, interrupts Jesus to tell him what he needs to say to her sister.

Jesus replies. Imagine the silence in that room after Martha's outburst. Jesus replies with some gentleness and understanding in his voice: Oh Martha, you are so distracted, you are so drawn away; you fuss about things that matter little ... only one thing matters ... Mary has chosen the good part. Perhaps Martha wondered like we do: what is that good part? What is the one thing that matters? The Greek word here for good is agathos ... and can also mean kind, generous.

Jesus stops at their house on his way to Jerusalem toward the end of his life ... he was on his way to Jerusalem where he will die. This was no ordinary social visit among friends. In these few moments of rest and refreshment, one commentator wrote: "Mary didn't scurry about distracting Jesus by worrying about spilled drinks and crumbs on the floor; she quietly sat by her Lord ministering to him with her greatest gift, her undivided attention. She was generous with her responsiveness, kindness, and love." That was the thing that mattered. That was the good part that was not taken from her. It was her absolutely natural gift of herself that he treasured.

It was as if Jesus had said to Martha, 'Sure I need something to eat, but what really nourishes my soul is being heard, listened to by someone who

really seems to care.” We don’t know what Martha’s reaction was to this reaction from Jesus ... perhaps she was able to see that what Mary was doing was of at least equal importance to her practical domestic work. Most likely Mary would not have recognized what she was doing as an offering to Jesus for what she was receiving was the sheer joy of being in the Lord’s presence.

Being in the Lord’s Presence. The Holy Communion is a primary way we experience that each week. We come together as a community of disciples. We bring our Mary and Martha selves and we re-member Jesus. We receive in the Bread – the Host, we call it - and in the Wine, and in the people around us, the very presence of the Lord.

Please look at the holy card you were given this morning. It is an Icon by a 14<sup>th</sup> century Orthodox monk named Andrew Rublev. Icons are said to be written, not painted, and they look strange sometimes to western eyes. The icon has a lofty purpose: to establish a relationship between the viewer and the pictured. Canon Edward West used to say that an icon is the place where you and the pictured agree to meet. Here are three men depicted as angels ... the scene is of the three angels who visited Abraham in the book of Genesis, but the Orthodox monk who was deeply devoted to God as Trinity wrote this Icon to give us a way to encounter God – to bring us into the presence of God.

From left to right: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Henri Nouwan calls this icon: Living in the House of Love (Praying with the Icons). The three are seated at a table which holds a cup. Altar. Chalice. Look closely. There is a place in the icon for you. The figures are seated in a circle, but it is not a completed circle. It is a C not an O ... you complete the circle when you join them at the table in the open space right before you. You are invited to be a part of the mutual love that defines God.

There is room for you. Not for you when you are perfect. Not for you when you are in a Martha or a Mary phase of life. Room for you as you are right now, with whatever pains and struggles and challenges, hopes and fears you brought with you today. It is a remarkable thing. It is the lesson of Martha and Mary. It is the reverse of what the way we usually think about our Christian living.

Don’t JUST do something. Sit there. Put this card in your Prayer Book or Bible or on your dressing table and let it be a reminder that you are invited to live in the House of Love.