

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • JULY 14, 2019
“THE GOSPEL ON BROADWAY”

THE LITANY
Based on Psalm 82

How long will you judge unjustly, by granting favor?
Give justice to the lowly and the orphan; deliver them.

Rise up, God! Bring justice to the earth!

Often, we don't know, we don't understand, we wander around in the dark.

Rise up, God! Bring justice to the earth!

Guide us, O Lord, as you declare us, children of the Most High.

Rise up, God! Bring justice to all! We belong to you.

THE SCRIPTURE

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰ 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." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴² there is need of only one thing.^[a] Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

THE MESSAGE

When One Plus One Equals One

Ed Varnum

The Musical: White Christmas – “Sisters”

Sisters! Sisters! It's such a fun song from such a fun musical. It's a song about sisters, so close.

“We're so close, we don't need a chaperone! I'll keep an eye on HER!”

“We're so close we share everything ... even the clothes we wear ... like the dress SHE wore when SHE went out while I stayed home.”

Ah, sibling rivalry! “Sisters” is a fun song because we GET it. There is no parent of siblings and no person who IS a sibling who hasn’t experienced that rivalry, that annoyance toward someone you love, but man can they get under your skin. Let’s be honest: it’s not always easy. If you have any doubt, just ask my sister. She’ll tell you.

I have one sibling, a sister who is six years older than I am. Which means that, for six years, she had the full attention of her parents and grandparents. Six years! And then, I came along and messed it up. The house had a NEW baby . . . and I have to say, a really cute little guy . . . (I’m sure I was. All babies are cute.) And besides that, I was sick an infant with lots of needs, which demanded even more of everyone’s attention. It just wasn’t fair.

She could see the handwriting on the wall so, one day, she took out a little suitcase, packed her favorite doll, and started out walking. Mom said, “Where are going?”

And my sister said, “Grandma’s house to live there, ‘cause you don’t love me no more.”

It wasn’t easy and it just got worse, because I got older and mischievous and spent a good deal of my waking hours figuring out how to torment her. It was not pretty. But we’re best of friends today, which is 100% to her credit as a gracious, forgiving Christian woman.

Sibling rivalry seems to be universal. It’s throughout the pages of scripture from Cain and Abel to our text for today. The Gospel According to Luke tells us about two sisters named Mary and Martha. Martha was SO UPSET with Mary. And you know what I’ve found over the years? Most people say she had every right to be. Honestly now! Let’s see hands. How many of you think Martha had every right to be ticked at her sister who left her to do all the work?

It makes sense. Why should Martha do everything to take care of their guests with no help from her sister? Aren’t Christians called to be servants? So, a lot of people find themselves siding with Martha. But then, isn’t Mary the perfect symbol of loving Christ above all; worshiping, learning, wanting to be closer to her Lord?

I’d like you to step away from this story with me for just a moment. We’ll get back to it. But consciously step back with me from Luke to a bigger picture of the four gospels. They all present the stories and sayings of Jesus. Some of the stories

and sayings are only in one Gospel, like this story of Mary and Martha in Luke. But many, many are in more than one, some in three or four.

The interesting thing is that the stories are very often in differing locations in the different gospels. They may be earlier in the life of Jesus or later. There may be stories or sayings all grouped together in one gospel but be separate from each other in another. Scholars tell us these stories or sayings are separate units or “pericopes” that circulated independent of each other and were placed by the gospel writers to be part of a larger message. In other words, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John put these sayings or stories where they are, so that what precedes or follows are part of that writer’s message. The setting and context of the story are central to the story’s message.

Okay. Let’s go back to Luke now.

In Luke 10:25-37, immediately before today’s lesson, we find the Parable of the Good Samaritan, also found only in Luke. But the parable is told in response to a statement that is found throughout the gospels, one of the key teachings of Jesus.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.”

In Luke, the statement is made by a lawyer, an expert in Jewish law. The expert asked Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responds with a question: “What do the scriptures say?” and the lawyer, this religious scholar, answers, ““Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus tells him, “That is correct! Do this and you will live.” But that’s not good enough for the lawyer. He wants specifics. Who is my neighbor? Who is it I must love and who can I get away with not loving because he’s not defined as neighbor? Jesus answers that question with a parable.

A man leaving Jerusalem on his way to Jericho. That’s important – he was leaving Jerusalem – when robbers attacked him, beat him, stripped of everything he had, and left him by the road half dead. A priest came by, presumably heading toward Jerusalem, presumably heading for the temple. He couldn’t touch a bloody, possibly dead person. He would be barred from entering the temple as ritually unclean. So, he not only didn’t stop; he tried to get as far away as he could from this apparently dead man. He went to the other side of the road and kept walking.

Then a levite came by, a levite who leads worship and ritual in the temple, presumably also on the way to Jerusalem and the temple. And for the same reason, he too passed on the other side. And then, of course, a Samaritan stopped and helped the man, serving as the neighbor loving his neighbor.

This parable is the story of Temple officials, religious professionals, who sought to obey the commandment to love God with all their heart, soul, and mind. But in their desire to do so, they consciously, intentionally passed by a person in need. In keeping one commandment, they broke the Great Commandment.

Immediately after the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke takes us to the home of Mary and Martha, where we find Martha on the other side of the spectrum. She was so upset! She was so upset that she even implied that Jesus didn't care!

“Lord, don't you care that my sister is leaving all this work for me? Tell her to get back here and help me!”

And I see Jesus smiling sympathetically and saying softly to his dear friend, “Martha, Martha. You are worried and upset about so many things. Mary has chosen one thing and it won't be taken away from her.”

I am suggesting that Luke has put two stories together to demonstrate one great truth.

1. The priest and levite were so religious, so focused on their time apart with God in the temple that they ignored a person right there before in dire need, someone they could help; loving God at the expense of loving neighbor.
2. Martha was so focused and worried about the physical responsibilities of serving that she ignored the presence and teaching of Christ, right there in her home, to the point of being resentful and bitter.

Luke wants us to understand: Worship and reverence centered on God is a good thing, a commandment to the faithful. But if that focus consumes us to the point there is no room for servant love for others – it becomes heresy. The many things that occupied Martha were good things, things of hospitality and care for others, But, when caring and loving others are so focused that we forget our Source, our Life in the person of Christ, right here with us . . . Well, half the commandment is not enough.

The commandment to love God plus the commandment to love neighbor equal the one Great Commandment. Standing alone, separate from one another, each is heresy. There is one commandment that needs both parts to make it whole. **This is where one plus one equals one.**

You know, I've noticed something. This business of bickering and rivalry and even hostility is not just in the household between siblings. We see it in the community and the workplace and our nation itself. It has created a division in our one nation to the point that disputes explode into attacks on character. That one we dispute is not just wrong, he or she is evil.

This hostile rivalry is affecting every part of our lives in this nation. More and more, I'm hearing the question that the lawyer asked Jesus, which was in essence, "What can I do to be saved?" What can we do? And the answer comes, **"Love the Lord your God with all you heart and soul and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself."**

Of course, not everyone is going to do that ... but those who call Jesus "Lord" probably should.

I would like us to try an experiment this week. Please do two things this week and let's see what happens.

1. For this week, let's consciously be aware of Christ in our hearts, the center and focus of your lives. Be cognizant that Jesus is with us, our Source, our Strength, our Guide, wherever we are, whatever we encounter.
2. And secondly, wherever we are, let us ask Christ who is with us to open our eyes to those around us who are hurting, who are somehow in need. It might be encountering someone who is angry or upset, even lashing out. Faced with that animosity, by the power and presence of Christ, we could find the power to not respond in kind but seek to understand what that person believes and feels . . . and to listen.

Loving God, loving neighbor . . . let's try it as an experiment this week. We might be witness to a miracle . . . perhaps to see a life transformed . . . perhaps even our own.

Love your God. Love your neighbor. As Pastor Nick so eloquently says it whenever he offers the benediction, it's that easy . . . and it's that hard. But Jesus said . . . it is the way . . . to life.