Thought for Wednesday 3rd June.

Prepared by Rev. Jean Holyhead.

Gospel reading: - Luke 10. 38-42

That lovely little story of the two sisters, Martha and Mary has never seemed so poignant to me as it has done over the last ten weeks of self isolation and lockdown.

I don’t know about you, but I have always been one of those people who has been amongst the “doers.” Whenever help has been needed, there I have been, on the front line, at the ready to fetch, support, help, serve others in times of need. I have tended to be a Martha.

The story goes that, as Jesus and His disciples were going on their way, they had to pass a village where Martha lived, and she immediately opened up her home to them. She offered Jesus and the twelve hospitality. Her Sister, Mary, was in her house at the time, but she chose to sit on the floor at the feet of Jesus, and listen carefully to what He was saying.

Martha, on the other hand, felt that she had to rush around making all the preparations that a host would need to make, having invited in those guests.

Well, you would, wouldn’t you? Or you would be a very poor host indeed.

But, Mary just carried on sitting at Jesus’s feet, listening, paying attention, hanging on to His every word, and Martha got agitated. She went to Jesus, and said to Him, “Don’t you care that Mary is leaving me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me.”

But Jesus, instead, said, “Martha, Martha, you are worried an upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Suddenly, I have found myself having to be a Mary, a complete role reversal. I have had to learn to allow others to help me, rather than me helping them. It has proven a challenge. It has reminded me, however, that Derek has been having to learn this for over a year now, since his stroke. He has had to sit, with frustration, and watch me, (and others), carry out a lot of the tasks that he once carried out. Weed the garden. Look after the car. Fetch the heavy shopping, put out the bins. Look after me, and watch out for the needs of our children and grandchildren, and many other tasks we took for granted

And now, since lockdown, I, too, have had to stop, be still, and listen, and just “be,” rather than “doing” for everyone else. It has been a salutary lesson. I have felt frustrated that I couldn’t just nip out and get what we need, look after our Son’s dog, do child care, entertain, visit our favourite restaurant, go into town, and most of all, lead worship.

I have been out of my comfort zone. I never thought I would see the day when I couldn’t be the busy Martha.

Just for now, God has called me to be a Mary. To be content to sit at the feet of Jesus, and to listen, be still.

I guess when all of this lockdown is over and things begin to return to the new normal, (whatever that turns out to be), we will all be slightly changed human beings, changed Christians. We will still, of course, be the same people, yet different, as a result of the experiences we have gained during this present crisis. Whoever we are, and whatever our situation, we have all found ourselves playing roles which were previously alien to us.

Our way of worshipping will be different in the future. The way we “do church,” will be different. Possibly our attitude to each other will be different, and our concept of the world and reality will be changed. And maybe we all needed a bit of a shake-up, though not in the form of this Virus.

Whether we have had to be a “doer,” or be still for weeks and months, our former complacency will have been shaken and we will never be the same again. Whether we have had to be a Martha or a Mary, (and chaps just because these are two female names, it doesn’t mean this message is not for you. It could just as easily have been a James or a John), it has certainly been an experience of a difference.

In first century Palestine, women could only be disciples of Jesus by offering their homes as places of respite and hospitality. They provided food and rest to Jesus and the male disciples as they journeyed around the region, as Jesus taught, healed and challenged the hard hearted.

This story, however, is for ALL of us. At some time or another, sooner or later, we will each find ourselves being called by God to be a Mary, a listener, to “be still and know that He is God.” To “let go and let God.” Not easy for some of us, but essential. Are we ready to be still? To really listen? To listen in prayer? To allow the word of God to truly sink in? To stand still amidst the chaos and busyness, the frenetic activity that in normal times is how life tends to be? To be the recipient of service, rather than the one who always has to be the server?

It’s not as though Jesus didn’t recognise the need for Marthas. He understood hospitality. He even took on the role of servant, and washed the feet of His disciples. He praised Mary because she had chosen to give her full attention to the words of their Guest, and I feel that He is reminding us all during this time of restricted travel and changed world, that there are times when we need to allow others to serve us, and times when it is right to just be still.

There was a poem we learned at school, written by William Henry Davies.

“What is this life, if full of care, we have no time to stop and stare?

No time to stand beneath the boughs and stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass, where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight, streams full of stars like skies at night.

No time to turn, at beauty’s glance, and watch her feet how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this, if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare.”

HYMN – Brother, Sister, let me serve you…….

<https://youtu.be/Qblqtb4jzL8>

PRAYER – “Heavenly Father, thank you for times of busyness and for times of stillness. Thank you for times of servanthood, and for times of being served. Teach us to be gracious in accepting help from others. Help us to listen attentively to your every word to us. We pray for all who are finding this time of change difficult. For those who are lonely, afraid, or in pain. For those who struggle to breathe as a result of Covid-19. For those who are bereaved at a time when grieving cannot even take it’s usual form. For the sick and disabled. For those who suffer as a result of war, and for those who have had to flee their own country and try to find refuge in lands where they do not understand the culture or language. For those who are unemployed. For the dying. Place your healing hands upon all who suffer in body, mind or spirit, and be their comfort and strength when their own strength is all but gone. In the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, we pray. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN – “God be with you till we meet again.” (Ralph Vaughan Williams tune).

<https://youtu.be/pWjsqHKT.WGg>

May the Lord bless us and keep us. May the Lord make His face to shine upon us and be gracious to us. May He grant us His peace, now and always, AMEN.