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Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

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Genesis 18:1-10a, Psalm 15; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42

I want to start my sermon off today with a promise. I promise not to shame you into thinking that you're too much like Martha and you need to be more like Mary. I promise that I won't make you feel guilty for not praying for an hour a day. I promise I won't compare you to spiritual powerhouses who read scripture every day and can quote chapter and verse of pretty much any Bible passage.

Now the truth, of course, is that spending time every day in scripture and prayer does do wonders for your faith and your soul. I was just telling Intern Pastor Jory the other day that I have a book of prayer for ministers that I keep on my desk, and I *usually* start every workday off by reading scripture, reading a reflection from the book, and praying for all of you. However, there are days when I have an early morning meeting or feel like I don't have time to devote to that spiritual practice, and I can literally feel the difference in the rest of my day when I don't engage in it. It's kind of like the difference you feel after you exercise—your body just feels better. When we read scripture and pray, our spirits *are* better.

However, I also know how busy and burdensome life often is. I understand why you don't wake up and immediately open your Bible to read and pray, whether it's because a toddler is demanding your attention or your body's aches and pains demand your focus to even get out of bed.

So today I want us to think about a realistic way in our lives today to engage the kind of spiritual practice Mary is engaging in in our gospel. In this story in Luke, Jesus affirms Mary for sitting at his feet and listening to him. He tells Martha who is distracted by her many tasks that there is need for only one thing, and Mary has chosen the better part. Jesus rightly reorders Martha's priorities.

But I am guessing that you, like me, have a hard time thinking about giving up all your daily tasks in order just to sit at Jesus' feet. Who is going to do

our jobs or parenting or grandparenting or cleaning or volunteering so that we can forget about those things and just focus on Jesus? How is it even possible to sit quietly with Jesus in our age of distractions?

Now, I want to applaud and affirm those of you who are able to do this—those of you who can eliminate distractions and set aside quiet time every day to pray and sit at the feet of Jesus. But I know for the rest of us, that kind of time and discipline is just not realistic for our lives.

So perhaps we can find a way, in the midst of our business and with the demands on our time and attention, to still sit at the feet of Jesus, to listen to what he is saying, to choose the “better part.”

I think a clue is found in our first reading today. In the story we heard from Genesis, God appeared to Abraham in the form of three men standing near him—but he might not have noticed if he hadn't been sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. It was while Abraham was taking care of himself—resting in the heat of the afternoon—that he experienced God. It was because he was too darn hot to do anything else that he was able to be attentive to the ways God had come close to him.

The next time that you are overheated and just can't continue with your daily tasks, take a rest, perhaps sit in the shade or the cool of your home in the heat of the day and notice how God appears to you. Perhaps when you're too darn hot to do anything else, you can focus more on how God is already present around you.

In fact, I wonder if anytime that things *don't* go the way we wished they would go, God is giving us an opportunity to open ourselves up to God.

A few weeks ago, when I was visiting Holden Village with my family and a few others from Christ Lutheran, I was so busy going to teaching sessions and doing artwork and having conversations all week that I didn't have time to journal. Which to me is ridiculous that I would spend a whole week at Holden without ever cracking open my journal to reflect and write. And so, on our last morning in the village, I intentionally gathered my journal and a pen and hiked down Railroad Creek for a way, sat on a rock overlooking the water, opened my journal, and started writing. Except that after I wrote only a few words, my pen ran out. I was so mad, but I was also too lazy to walk the 15 minutes back up the hill to get a new pen, so I sat for a minute being

frustrated that this was my last chance to journal and now it was all ruined. But then, perhaps it was the Holy Spirit who intervened, because I had an aha moment that reoriented my priorities.

I looked up at the mountains and trees and thought to myself, perhaps God is giving me an opening to just be. Instead of getting frustrated that things hadn't turned out the way I expected, I just sat and took in what was around me: the sunshine, the singing of the birds, the rustle of the wind in the trees, and the grandiose view that brought to mind Psalm 121—"I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where does my help come, my help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth." After I sat there for several minutes, I literally felt more peace and felt closer to God than I had all week, far more than I would have if I had tried to fill up all that time writing in my journal.

I wonder if the next time you are sitting for a long time at a stoplight or sitting in the waiting room of your doctor's office for what feels like forever or finding that your phone's battery has died or your pen has run out, you might use that time to instead "choose the better part." Instead of getting frustrated, consider that time an opportunity to open yourself up to God's presence and what God is trying to communicate to you.

Because it is when we choose the better part, when we intentionally turn our attention to God and open ourselves to God that we can hear and know the presence and promises of God.

But I also want you to remember this: even Sarah who was busy getting cakes ready for the three visitors in our story in Genesis encountered the presence and promise of God—Sarah who was inside the tent, doing her tasks, being busy like Martha, still heard God's promise that she would bear a child, even in the midst of her busyness. Although today's first reading ends before the rest of the story, do you remember how we know Sarah heard God's promise? Because the scripture says, "So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I be fruitful?'" And sure enough, she was. Even when we are busy and in the midst of our daily tasks, God still encounters us. Jesus was in Martha's house, he was right there with her, even though she was busy. Jesus is with you, in your home, at your job, even when you are busy and in the midst of your daily tasks.

Rather than feeling guilty for not sitting quietly without distractions for an hour every day to pray and read scripture, let the small times that disrupt you reorient your priorities.

When things don't work out as you expect them to be, let those times tutor you into a spiritual practice of choosing the better part—turning to prayer and gratitude and scripture passages, rather than being frustrated that things didn't happen as you expected them to.

And when you are exhausted at the end of the day and your head finally hits the pillow, let your last thoughts be of God and go to God. For God always is thinking about you, and when like Mary you choose the better part, it will not be taken away from you. Amen.