

July 10, 2016
Rev. Curran Reichert

A Day of New Beginnings

Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in.

— Isaac Asimov

Jesus Visits Martha and Mary — Luke 10:38-42 (NRSV)

Now as they went on their way, he 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."

My Mom taught high school English for seventeen years on the Russian River in Forestville. Her students were children of farmers and folks who liked living in the country. After a while she took on the production of the yearbook and teaching speech and debate, ultimately coaching her teams to national success. These were kids who often didn't have a set of dress clothes, so my mother regularly raided my closet to come up with proper attire for completion weekends. She worked hard with these kids, from stashing oatmeal packets in her cupboards so those who came to school without breakfast would get something warm to eat at the beginning of the school day, to putting in the extra time when hearts were broken or times were tough at home.

Some of these kids were great to my mom. There are still days when I am out in town with her that someone will approach and give her a big hug and tell her how much she meant to them. But some of those kids were downright ornery. They could be cruel to one another and they could be awful to her. There was more than one who drove her to the edge of sanity.

And yet, no matter how badly an individual behaved on any given day, the next morning in Mrs. Reichert's classroom they had a clean slate. My Mother always said that "Every child deserves a new day."

Now my mom is a Martha. If there is a party she is the one in the kitchen; a thrift shop, she's running it; a church event, she's volunteering. And although I sometimes hear her say she is tired, while she is doing whatever she is doing she is always positive about it. Always.

The bone Jesus had to pick with Martha was not that she was a worker bee; it was that she was resentful about it. It was only when Martha complained and tried to call out her sister that Jesus suggested she consider another course of action. Jesus could not abide a martyr. (There is noteworthy irony there.)

Summers and summer vacation were very, very important to my Mom while she was a teacher. I believe it took her those full three months to fill up her generosity well. It took a substantial break to recover from the last and prepare for the next outpouring of service. And I believe that is the point Jesus is making in this text: To everything there is a season.... A season to rest, a season to act, a season to act, and a season to rest.

I have been listening to the news this week (as I'm sure we all have been) with shock and dismay, despair, anger and grief. I have been asking myself in the face of all that is happening in our nation right now, *is it time to be Martha, a person of action, or is it time to be Mary, a person who is willing to invest in listening and discernment?* If I am Mary, what am I listening for? Is there a truth, a hidden tidbit of wisdom than can be made manifest from all this tragedy? This is such a time of disorientation, what should we be listening for? If I am Martha, if the church is Martha, then what is our voice, what is our march, our rallying cry to action? It feels hard to discern right now; it's not exactly clear what moves to make. What role is the church to play in the drama as it is unfolding? The ground beneath our feet feels shaky and uncertain.

I listened on Saturday morning to the President speak from his last NATO Summit in Poland. Of course he eloquently and calmly spoke to the unrest of his people. His voice offered words to both the Mary and the Martha in us all. First to Mary. He said we must collectively pause, and mourn, and be together. He said we must be thoughtful and not reactionary in our responses to the tragedies of this past week. He reminded us that "The actions of a few do not define all of us." He went on to say that this is a new day; it is not the warfare of the sixties. Today there are police protecting peaceful protests, and protestors are speaking up for the safety of the police. He bade us be cautious, not to succumb to the illusion that we are more divided than we are united. I would add that listening for that truth, the truth inspired by unity, requires the patience of Mary, because of course on the surface we hear so much divisiveness, but it is our unity that provides the foundation for action.

Next our President called out to the Martha in our hearts. In answer to the question *What do we do now?* he said, "We must have confidence to build on the better angels of our nature. We must pause to reflect and not paint anyone with an overly broad brush."

That may to some not sound like much of an action, but at this moment in time it may be the most important action we as a nation and we as individuals can take—not painting anyone with an overly broad brush. "There is sorrow, anger, confusion about next steps, but there is unity in recognizing that this is not how we want our country to behave." Today is a new day, a day that requires a marriage of discernment and action.

A Message from the Wisdom of the Elders

Author Unknown

You have been telling the people that this is the Eleventh Hour.
Now you must go back and tell the people that this is The Hour.

Here are the things that must be considered:

Where are you living?
What are you doing?
What are your relationships?
Are you in right relation?
Where is your water?
Know our garden.
It is time to speak your Truth.
Create your community.
Be good to each other.
And do not look outside yourself for the leader.

This could be a good time!

There is a river flowing now very fast.
It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid.
They will try to hold on to the shore.
They will feel like they are being torn apart, and they will suffer greatly.

Know the river has its destination.
The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off toward the middle of the river,
keep our eyes open, and our heads above the water.
See who is there with you and celebrate.
At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally, least of all ourselves!
For the moment we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt.
The time of the lonely wolf is over.

Gather yourselves!
Banish the word struggle from your attitude and vocabulary.
All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.
We are the ones we have been waiting for.

Today is a day for new beginnings
May all that we do, our listening and our acting be done in a sacred way and with celebration
for all God's creation.

Amen