



Sermon – March 16, 2025

Luke 10:38-42 I grew up watching the show Mr. Rogers' neighborhood. It is a show I still love. Mr. Rogers was a true icon and hero to me, with his calm and gentle approach and commitment to living out his values. Mr. Rogers has a quote or a story for seemingly every situation. One that has felt particularly fitting lately is when he described seeing scary things in the news when he was growing up. He said his mother would say to him, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping".

I try to remember this story when I feel overwhelmed by grief, pain, and suffering I see in our country and our world. We are in a time when we need all the help we can get. Pastor Mike spoke last week about the "Three As", Awareness, Action, and Advocacy. Three steps that can guide us on our way build communities that are stronger, that protect the marginalized and look out for those among us who need help. I was so heartened this past week to be at the state capitol with over 400 other Lutherans and Lutheran-sympathizers, advocating for Lutheran Services in Iowa, to hear people like ELCA pastor and state senator Sarah Trone-Garriott speak about the work she is doing to support mental health care, refugee resettlement, and children in foster care. In the midst of days of bad news, there is hope in knowing there are others who are helping.

The helping, the ministry is vital work. We know this. We see this in our lives. So I want to encourage us, as we hear this Gospel story today and consider the lives of Mary and Martha, to hear what Jesus says in the context of the valuable work we are called to do.

I am a Martha defender. Primarily because I think, too often, this story has been interpreted as one that dismisses the work that Martha is doing, or paints Mary and Martha as caricatures to be pitted against each other. I worry that if we disregard Martha's work, if we say that the cooking and cleaning she is committed to aren't valuable tasks, that we end up devaluing those who are committed to keeping our buildings and cities and homes clean, those who work hard to grow and prepare our food. And ultimately, we then end up with a faith that never actually does anything for anyone else—a faith that doesn't see our understanding of God's grace realized in the world. And if we lean too heavily the other way, we might be in trouble of forgetting why we're doing what we're doing in the first place. This is a story, as our liturgy reads, that is full of messy middles.

So, when we hear Jesus say that Mary has chosen the better part, let's be careful not to diminish the importance of Martha's hospitality. "We don't need all of that 'other stuff'," we might say, and that might, ultimately, be true. Because we don't. In the same way that we don't *need* to have a church building, or candles, or coffee after worship for us to still be a community of faith. Still, that doesn't mean they aren't valuable, that they don't add to our experience of worship and community, helping us become a stronger faith community. When Jesus turns to Martha and tells her that Mary has chosen the better part, again, I hope we don't diminish the work that Martha is doing. Instead, I think Jesus is giving a reminder, one that we too often forget: our work, as important and vital as it is, is not the thing that saves us, and it cannot be the thing we depend on to sustain us.

Jesus knows the work that is coming—Jesus knows his death is coming. He knows what his followers are about to go through, knows that they will need these moments to get them through it. They will need the moments of learning, the experiences of deep connection with our incarnate God to get them through. So, Jesus invites us to settle in, to return to God, knowing that God is our source, our refuge, and our rock. That in God we are refreshed and renewed so that we can be sustained in our work—so that our responsibilities and ministries that might start to become things that we "have" to do, become things that we "get" to do because of God's grace. That God is where we can slow down, where we can make sure we are being fully present, so that we can be sustained and prepared for the work that is to come.

In Christ we are also reminded that as important, as vital as our work is, it will not be the thing that can save us. Sometimes I worry that we place our identities solely in our work and ministry and in doing so we become overly focused on being needed by others that we might forget that what we really need is to be loved. We might become distracted by all there is to do that we forget that the real work, that of overcoming death to save creation, has already been completed for us. When we know that, when we take the time to sit with and experience the overwhelming love of God for us and for all of humanity, we are renewed and encouraged to go out and be the hands of God in our community. It is not faith versus work, but rather our faith that prepares and

equips us for the work.

It is a true joy and privilege in working here at Grace to witness the ways in which this plays out in our community of faith—in the myriad of ways that the members of this community use their gifts in service to the church and the world. I hope that in our Lenten journey and beyond we can trust in God's promise of resurrection to renew us to be helpers in our world.

Vicar Jesse Hershberger