



July 20 – Unexpected Company

Often when reading this text, I think about my 7th birthday. Growing up in a large family, there were seldom parties outside of family parties. Each birthday, we got to pick out what Mom would make for dinner and the shape of the cake. Then, we would celebrate over supper. As my 7th birthday approached, I decided that I was going to have a birthday party. I should have told my Mom. Instead, I invited all my friends, and to my surprise, both of them showed up. My Mom freaked out. The house was not ready for company, and she was worried we would not have enough food. I was sent to the park with my friends while she worried about preparing the house for the company.

At the time, I thought it was a little silly. What are two more people when you are feeding 9 already? There were always leftovers. Surely, we would have enough. Now, as an adult, I see the situation quite differently. One wants to be attentive when showing hospitality to guests. Your focus shifts to the other, to the guest.

It is easy to empathize with Martha. There is company, and one should be ready to show hospitality. It is easy to imagine Martha in the kitchen, chopping veggies, boiling water, preparing a meal. With each minute grows the intensity with which she starts to set the utensils down with increasing force. You can imagine the occasional muttering as her sister chooses not to help in showing hospitality in the customary way.

At first, the scene almost sounds comedic, as Martha bangs stuff around. Then the reality sets in: that each and every one of us at different times in our lives. No matter what we do, there are times when busy work begins to take over, we start to feel burned out. It can even start out as joyous work. Over time, it moves from joy, to routine, to obligation, to resentment.

If you aren't sure that is true, how do you feel when you hear the question, "How would you like to serve on the Congregational Council?" What does your body say when asked about the Property Committee, Altar Guild, or other committees and teams? Maybe it is a task force at work, or the not quite so optional overtime. Whether we want to admit it or not, there are times when all of us feel like Martha in this story, frustrated that we are doing all of this work while others sit back and enjoy. It gets frustrating.

As I get older, I realize that my Mom's reaction was likely because of a sense of fatigue and burnout. For years, she had worked the overnight shift and then took naps in the evening after supper. She had recently lost two children in infancy. She was working, unceasingly, at the work of maintaining our home with all the children who, at times, took this work for granted.

I see the same mindset creep into congregational life. There are a number of people who spend countless hours tending to the busy work of congregational ministry. This may be through teams, committees, or the council. They are here in the evenings, on weekends, at special events. The table linens are cleaned, the candles set out, the microphones on, etc. It takes a lot of work to maintain a congregation. It can lead to burnout. It is tiring.

Jesus reminds us about balance. It is not that the work Martha was doing was wrong. It is about finding that sense of balance. It is about doing the work of hospitality and dwelling in the Word. When out of balance, the work of hospitality shifts from thinking of the other to thoughts of self. "Why do I have to do all this while _____ can just sit there?" Jesus reminds both of these siblings to find balance.

I think that is part of the draw of the work of the Being New Spirituality Center. There is a draw to dwelling in the Word and opening to the work of the Spirit. It is not about the busy work of the congregation. It is focused on being one with the Spirit. This collective work is the reminder all of us need, to stay balanced. We are to do the work of hospitality and mission. Amen

Pastor Michael Schmidt