

Sermon_ Sixth Sunday after Pentecost_July 20th, 2025.

May the Holy Spirit descend to inspire our hearts and imagination.

Good morning.

In today's Gospel, Luke presents us with a brief sketch of two sisters.

And for the next couple of minutes, we're going to look at four points of living that Luke's story brings to mind.

Distraction.

Vacation.

Distraction on Vacation.

And finally, who might be sitting in the beach chair next to you.

Luke tells us... that at the end of a long day of traveling -- Jesus -- and his entourage -- have arrived at the home of Martha and her younger sister Mary. New Testament scholars tell us that the two women were known to Jesus, and that there was a friendly relationship. He enjoyed spending time in their company. Although, the account of the Mary/ Martha incident is barely 120 words, Luke masterfully captures the essence of the situation. He really nails the dynamic between these two sisters.

So.... Jesus has arrived, sits in the main part of the house, holding forth, his disciples gathered round relaxing, listening to his teaching and commentaries.

Right in the middle of them, at Jesus' feet, sits Mary.

Meanwhile, back in the kitchen, chopping, turning the spit on the hearth, mixing the sauces, we have Martha -- in full-steam-ahead mode preparing a meal and hospitality for Jesus, his disciples, and many others. it's a large group.

Luke says that "Martha was distracted by many tasks". The Greek word "*perispao*" can be translated as "distracted". But it also carries the connotation of something much more physical -- not just "distracted", as in "I can't concentrate...". But "buffeted, knocked about, as when you're in the middle of a crowd, being jostled and pushed along. High stress hospitality prep. Overwhelming. Too much. Just too much. Really. Till finally, Martha has had it!

She storms out of the kitchen to Jesus and the group. Steps up and says

“Lord.... don't you care that my sister has left me to do all this work by myself??? Tell her then to help me”

Martha's stress and frustration has propelled her into the other room, interrupt Jesus and a) accuse him of being thoughtless, and b) tells him what to do about it.

Mary doesn't say a word.

Silence.

Now what?

But in the next moment, Luke the storyteller – with subtle insight into Jesus the man... writes...

“But the Lord answered her, “Martha.... Martha...you are worried and distracted by so many things; there is need for only one thing.”

He says her name twice. And I think Luke implies there's also a sigh, and a smile. Jesus sees the frazzled state of this exhausted woman: he empathetically says her name twice. “Martha... Martha...”. There's an intimacy in saying that name twice. There's a warmth. A special connection. And then right after, he makes an acknowledgement of Mary's choice, as he continues

Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her.”

And so, Luke closes the chapter on this brief tension between sisters.

He doesn't tell us what happened next.

Did Martha just say “Fine. Whatever”. And stomp back to the kitchen?

Did she sit down beside Mary, and let the hospitality of the Jesus & his entourage play itself out in some much less formal way?

Luke doesn't tell us.

But several things come to mind – first: that kind of sibling conflict. So familiar. In fact, that's how Luke pulls us into his story. Those moments where there's that sense of “I'm doing all the work and she's just sitting there. So familiar to us.

Familiar in families.

Familiar in marriages

Familiar in the workplace.

And often in that moment, inevitably arises anger, resentment. And even more stress. But in viewing this chapter from another perspective, we have Mary -- taking a break from the stress of meal preparation and hospitality. She takes -- one might say -- a small vacation, a vacation to rest in the attention to the one thing that's important.

And on this July morning we find ourselves in high summer, prime vacation season. A season that innately offers the opportunity to take a break from our usual ways of engaging with our faith, a break from our usual prayers, worship, and ministry. Faith on vacation.

The summer I was eight years old, our family escaped the heat of Philadelphia, and went to spend a week down at The Shore -- Beach Haven, New Jersey. My mother was always strict about my brothers and I going to mass every Sunday. Even in summer. But now at Beach Haven, on vacation, my brothers and I were CERTAIN as the week wound down to Sunday that there would be no church this week. Yay!! As a matter of fact, we hadn't seen any churches as we rode our bikes around Beach Haven's hot sandy side streets. But my Mom was religiously resourceful. She'd somehow found out that -- while that her kids were correct there was no church in Beach Haven -- there was a mass said every Sunday on stage at the downtown movie theater. And so, Sunday at 10:00 my Mom, my younger twin brothers, and I are going to church at the movies. Wow. Walking past the popcorn counter in the lobby on our way the Holy Eucharist. Faith on vacation. The same but different. And fun.

Faith on vacation. Our own St. Paul's 9:00 summer services on the lawn.

There's another way -- nowhere near the nave or St. Paul's. Sitting in a chair on the beach. There are certain people in your lives who -- when they're sitting in a chair next to you -- you feel their energy, strength, calm, comfort. Ease. Their quiet gift.

When we're kids -- that person is often a parent, or grandparent. Later in life that comforting energy sitting there next to us might be from a special friend or fishing buddy, lover, spouse... son, daughter...

That gift of a special energy by your side.

Now, imagine the person sitting next to you in the beach chair is Jesus. Also on vacation. Sitting there. Not talking, not preaching, not performing miracles. Just sitting in the beach chair next to you. Both of you staring out at the ocean.

Or Jesus on vacation in the wooden Adirondack chair beside you, staring up at the mountain ridge.

Or Jesus in the porch chair beside you staring out at your tomatoes growing in the backyard garden.

And feel the calm of his presence. As he just sits there. Nothing more. Next to you.

The two of you doing nothing. On vacation.

And so, as I draw to a close.... I'd like to suggest you give something a try this summer....

There'll be moments when you find yourself like Martha – distracted, buffeted, stressed by work, family anxieties, multi-tasking, taking the kids to camp, getting the kids from camp, watching the news.... In the midst of all the distraction, in the middle of the buffeting

Stop. Listen as you say your name to yourself.... Twice (as Luke tells us -- Martha, Martha...)

Say your name -- (Name... Name) Sigh. Then smile.

And just for a moment.... leave the buffeting behind.... go on vacation. With your faith.

It's summer. Vacation time.

Amen

John Orlock – July 20 - 2025