



The Inclusive Community

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Priorities and Balance

July 18, 2010

Luke 10: 38-42

Homily of Kathleen M.B. Bailey

I pray that the thoughts I have to share with you today resonate in some way in your being as they did with me as they were developing.

Today's communion prayer is "Call." I believe that we are called in many ways. The vibrations or power of the God who is in us and all the universe seems to call me frequently. Sometimes I hear the call and other times I miss it. Although I don't think I have a mailbox or call waiting on that line, I do believe that the Spirit persistently calls back.

I don't know about you, but I find that I am often called to speak to someone about one issue or another and as I talk to them, I realize that I really have been called to get a particular point across to ME. Oh yes, it applies to the others too, but it undoubtedly applies to me.

I have been in a powerful struggle for some time now, possibly even years. I have found myself wanting to deal with a wide range of situations. My home is basically in shambles, I have belongings piling up at home, in the basement, and in a storage unit that all need sorting and much should be tossed. My responsibilities at work keep increasing often because of choices I make to try to do a better job and make a greater impact.

In the midst of all this chaos, I recognize that I need to set priorities and get moving toward solutions. Yet, I find myself escaping to novels, games and napping. I promise myself that tomorrow I will do many of the chores. Yet, the next day I find myself using my time in a variety of ways and do not move toward the order and sanity I so desperately need. I spend a large proportion of my time scolding myself and desperately struggling with setting and keeping priorities.

PRAYER

KATHLEEN M.B. BAILEY

In the midst of this turmoil - I get a call from Anthony. He tells me that none of our celebrants are available for July 18th and would I be willing to fill in.

As you all know, I greatly appreciate opportunities to lead in any part of the service. It is a major part of how this community nurtures me. Therefore, of course, I said yes. A few days later I received the information for the July and August bulletins. I anxiously looked to find the theme and readings for July 18th. What do you know the theme is: Priorities. I'm quite familiar with the themes that Anthony selects because it is a major factor in my choice of music. I can tell you almost every theme that we use in the Inclusive Community. Never before has a theme been PRIORITIES. Can any of you think of a time that this was the theme?

Yep, a primary focus that I must deal with and if I am honest, the topic that I try to avoid. (It is no coincidence that the only Spanish word that I really know is mañana).

Perhaps it could be said that Jesus came to challenge us to reevaluate our priorities. He certainly challenged the Pharisees repeatedly.

Last week we explored the story of the Good Samaritan: The priority: love your neighbor. Today's story leads us to the priority of loving God.

Now part of the irony here is that the lawyer, you may remember from last week, asked what he needed to "do" to "inherit eternal life". And in this story about Martha and Mary, both of whom loved Jesus, Jesus says that all of our efforts and deeds are to be balanced and even nourished by times of doing absolutely nothing but sitting and being with God.

Several comments I read on this scripture discussed the difficulty that this story causes modern pastors. Knowing the importance of hospitality in the church and the fact that much of the work is done by the women, pastors are somewhat afraid of highlighting that Mary (sitting at Jesus' feet) has chosen what is better.

As we look at the social customs of that time, we realize that Jesus and Mary were, in fact, committing a social taboo. Women of that time could serve men, but it was not appropriate for them to join in the discussions with the men. People of the time probably were more shocked that Mary was assuming the role of religious disciple rather than helping in the kitchen.

Remember, the scriptures were written well after the fact. They were written to share the spirit and teachings of God, and to teach a lesson that may be needed at that time or place. The reference in this passage is not to downgrade the hospitality. Jesus often emphasized that feeding and being a servant are highly valued and expressions of love.

The message is that focusing on the lessons of Jesus, spending quiet focused time with God is important and balancing the priorities is essential.

One writer that spoke on this passage even pointed out that since Jesus could feed the 4,000 in Matthew 15 and 5,000 in Matthew 14, he could certainly handle supper for a house full of people, so Martha's worry was unnecessary

Henri Nouwen, priest, professor and writer, once wrote that our lives, while full, are often unfulfilled. "Our occupations and preoccupations," he said, "fill our external and internal lives to the brim. They prevent the Spirit of God from breathing freely in us and thus renewing our lives."

Jesus who was so effective at turning things upside down and challenging others to examine their priorities and balance in their lives, liberated Mary from her socially defined status of inferiority and marginalization. Not only was Mary transformed, but the world was transformed by this event.

I started writing this sermon several weeks ago fully believing that I would find the magic to get my priorities in order and get my life back on track. I thought the problem was my cluttered mind and God would put me on the right path. I am getting an answer to my dilemma. But, it is not the kind of answer I was expecting. The problem, it turns out, is not priorities and balance. It is not a matter of doing all the many tasks in a correct order. The message is actually adding another task to the long list. The task that I too often leave out in my rush to survive. The most important task! The task of focusing on God, of spending quiet time and listening.

I have had many experiences in the past where I have heard the still calm voice guiding me. Now that I understand that God is not off in the distance somewhere out there but is within me and all that is around me, it should be even easier to sit and listen. I guess what I was meant to hear most clearly today is instead of "Martha, Martha,..." it is "Kathy, Kathy... you are worried and distracted by many things but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better. She sat at Jesus' feet and listened.

Barbara Brown Taylor said : "To hear Jesus talk about it, eternal life also means hitting the jackpot now; eternal life means enjoying a depth and breadth and sweetness of life that is available right this minute and not only after we have breathed our last...Let the summer showers of God's love soak the seeds of your right answers so that they blossom into right actions and watch the landscape begin to change. Just do it, and find out that when you do, you do live, and live abundantly, just like the man said." Amen.