

## Reflection for Pentecost 6 by Rev'd Peter Shaw

Dear Friends,

The reading we have just heard is I think, one of those lovely readings from the Bible which have the personal touch; by that I mean that we can all identify ourselves with the situations that the characters find themselves in.

It is one of those family situations, and so close to our own lives;

for instance, when we have unexpected guests in our homes and someone is left to hurriedly do all the tidying up – it happens to us and I will not volunteer the information as to whether it is Sue or I do the tidying up – but I think that you can guess!!

I wonder what was going through Martha's mind? – perhaps it was something like this

*I'm so glad to see Jesus again. Now, let me see - we've got leeks and garlic and dates. Some roast lamb wouldn't go amiss. I might have to use some left-overs - but I don't like to do that for Jesus! It's got to be something special - just for him! So perhaps instead of warming up that roast lamb from yesterday, we might have some fresh fish. That would be nice! I'd better send Mary down to the fish market.*

*Oh...she's sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him! Fine for her, but not fair for me! I'm sure it would be nice to listen to Jesus, but we don't have time! There's a bit more dusting and sweeping to do. Only one jar of water - I know it's enough, but for a special guest we must go to the well and draw some fresh. The herbs bought yesterday would do at a pinch, but I don't like it when the visitor's as important as Jesus! Amazing how those flowers have lasted. Three days old and looking as fresh as new. Of course, I know - and **Mary** knows - that they aren't as fresh as new at all. We need some new flowers! Oh.... she's still sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him! Fine for her, but not fair for me! We don't have time to listen to Jesus - he's too important a guest by far. I can't cope! I can't stand the injustice of it! I'll just have to break in! I must have Mary's help **etc. etc. etc.!!***

When we read this Gospel story, it is easy to come to the conclusion that there is something wrong - Jesus should have told Mary to help Martha, **but he doesn't**. Worse still, he commended her for her apparent inactivity!

Now, being honest with ourselves, haven't we had these thoughts and feelings about this incident?

Don't we find ourselves identifying with Martha?

### **Distracted**

There is no criticism of Martha for her careful attention to many details. She was obviously the organiser. The smooth running of everything depended so much on her planning and action. But she was **distracted** by it all.

But distracted from what?

She was distracted from what was now most important.

There was a tension - a pulling - between all the housework that needed doing and the attention that should be paid to the Guest, in this case one of the most important guests ever to visit that household, and anyone else's for that matter. And I hope the little characterisation I used previously gives some idea of what this tension was like.

We sometimes make a job much bigger and far more complex than necessary.

In the situation of Martha and her sister Mary - now that Jesus had arrived, attention needed to be given to the Guest. The housework needed to be reduced to "no frills". The meal - something extra super-duper special would have been fine - that hasn't been possible and they should "make do" with what they had.

Someone must attend to the Guest, and Martha needs to whisk through the basic necessities so that she can join her sister. Did you notice Martha's comment in the characterisation earlier, "***I'm sure it would be nice to listen to Jesus, but we don't have time!***"! How many times do we say that in our daily lives?

### **Choosing the Right Thing**

We remember Jesus' words to Martha in our reading: “

- <sup>40</sup>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.'
- <sup>41</sup>But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; <sup>42</sup>there is need of only one thing.\* Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

In our lives, there are so many things to be done. In the organisation of home and the life of our society we face the daily clamour to achieve more. We too face the conflict between the urgent and "what is better".

Attending to Jesus and listening to his Word has a prior claim on our lives. He knows the busyness of our lives and the time and effort we will correctly spend doing many things. He also knows the panic, the irritation, the frustration, the resentment... that creeps in among the many things we have to do. He knows the despair, confusion, anxiety and guilt caused as we see how little we are doing to alleviate the major social hurts of our time - hurts like unemployment, domestic violence, marriage breakdown, loneliness, the current economic uncertainties – climate change.

It all adds up to a call to "go, go, go!" with no let-up, until we fear we might drop. Some burn out along the way, and that sadly includes a lot of clergy, but we must keep on go-go-going! The pressure is upon us! We can't stop!

But there's a point at which we **must** stop.

As Christians we must always remember: **If we don't give attention to Jesus and hear his Word we won't keep on going. Our actions will be misdirected, ineffective and most likely a waste of time.**

There is a balance and wholeness in that statement. And there is an important priority and progression.

Too often we have broken what needs to be together. In too many congregations there has been a division between the prayer-meeting types and the worker types, between those whose main involvement has been to attend to the "preaching and teaching" and those whose practical urge is always to "practice".

There has to be a balanced flow through.

If we are to go into the community, it is imperative that we centre our lives on God and feed ourselves on his Word. Then, by the work of his Spirit, we will be released - not to go-go-go - but to give ourselves as we go. There is something wrong if our working is not a response to our Lord.

And if we are to glorify God, we need to be open to him and transformed by his grace - released and impelled into service. There is something wrong if our prayer meeting doesn't lead us to roll up our sleeves and get stuck into the things that the Lord has for us to do.

We must put our trust in Jesus. He loves us. He came for us. He died for our sins. He rose again for us. We must spend time with him listening. Pray and read the Word - every day. Don't start a day without spending time with him listening.

As Christians, it is beholden on us to spread the good news given to us in the Gospels through sharing and discussing our faith with others. This is quality time - of top priority. Without it the rest of our lives will be off-balance.

We must seek each day, not just personal calmness and peace, but the wisdom and spiritual energy to recognise and do the will of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

**If we do that, then we will indeed find true personal calmness and peace.**

**AMEN**