

Driven to Distraction
July 18, 2010/ Ord 16C
Laura Smith Conrad

Scripture: Genesis 18:1-10

18The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ²He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” ⁶And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” ⁷Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.” ¹⁰Then one said, “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.”

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰But 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.” ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Proclamation of the Word

You may have noticed some new signs around Clemson which read,
“Texting and Emailing are prohibited in the City of Clemson.”

I understand Clemson is the first city in the state to enact such a law.

I also understand that Freshmen Orientation at the University includes
some heavy duty briefing on this new law.

Yes, we are less than a month from the return of students.

Those of us who live by Smart phones (which are usually smarter than I,
but not my children), Blackberries, or even just regular cell phones used
for texting,
with a law we are forced to be mindful of how our behavior affects
the safety of all on the road.

On Pentecost Sunday, when we had all been honking like geese to encourage
one another (you had to be there),
one of you told me about the bumper sticker you had seen which reads

“Honk if you love Jesus. Text and drive if you want to meet him.”

I admit I have to use every second to accomplish all the things I have to do.

Email and phone calls are the main ways I stay in touch and do my job.

I have to consciously place my phone in my purse when I drive so I
will not try to squeeze in one more call between here and my
destination.

I knew it was bad when I would sit the phone down beside me in the car and
pick it up every time I was stopped to see if I had a new email- squeezing
in one more response between the yellow, red, and green lights.

I don't even text because I cannot handle one more communication tool to
manage.

Oprah even started the “No Phone Zone” campaign telling people put your
phone in the trunk if it is that much of a temptation.

Indeed we are driven to much distraction.

So many distractions.... Texting and driving is just one of a multitude that we deal
with in our contemporary culture.

Today's Scripture of Jesus' visit with the sisters, Mary and Martha.

More than just acquaintances, Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus are
good friends of Jesus.

They are never called disciples, but we know that they provide a place of
rest and hospitality for this itinerant preacher, teacher named Jesus

on several occasions.

Martha is driven to distraction in the scene today from Luke's gospel.

She welcomes Jesus into her home and then gets busy preparing food, getting a wash basin so he can wash up from his journey.

All the while, little sister, Mary is curled up at Jesus' feet like a child. She wants to hear about all that has been happening in his life, trying to catch up since they last saw each other.

Over the years many have said that Mary was listening to Jesus' teachings, but the Bible does not tell us exactly what the content of their conversation is.

Sure, he is probably teaching, but even more so, we know that they are friends. What we do know is that she is listening to him.

This week my good friend, Becky and her three year old son, George (or Jorge as Hallie and Avery call him) came down from Louisville, Kentucky for a visit.

Becky and I went to college together.

She was my maid of honor in our wedding.

We try to vacation to see each other at least once a year.

I admit that it is a challenge.

Because my husband Chuck and my friend, Becky are teachers, and the kids are in school, my family cannot go anywhere during school year. Then to complicate matters our family is grounded every Sunday and major school holidays like Christmas and Easter.

So it is very hard to continue to see each other and especially to spend time as our children grow and grow fast they do.

But we manage to squeeze in a visit here and there because we care about each other and are old friends.

My guess is that Mary is just glad to see Jesus to spend time with him, to catch up and to sit at his feet and listen.

Martha on the other hand is busy, busy, busy as woman of the house.

Near east culture required her to provide hospitality.

And hospitality was harder in those days.

You could not take your out of town guests out to Pixie and Bills for dinner or just pull something out of the freezer.

There was no running water in the bathroom in which your guests could wash up.

And you know Jesus had not just stopped in at Wendy's for a burger, he was probably tired, dirty and hungry.

In the Genesis text, as well, Abraham and Sarah were obligated to care for the strangers traveling in their midst for their faith and culture required it.

“You must welcome the sojourner and stranger in your midst,” the Torah says.
It is a matter of honor and obedience.

So Abraham does what any good patriarch does,
he sends the servants to kill a calf, cook it over the spit, and
has Sarah baking bread.

One could not run to Ingles to pick up a few groceries.
Hospitality was hard work and so necessary.

It was the duty of the host to serve the strangers.

Calf cooking on the spit,
sounds sort of like Homecoming PSA pig pickin’, under the oak trees,
Doesn’t it?

But Martha has worked herself up into a frenzy.

She is distracted by her many tasks- driven to distraction and
overwhelmed by her duty.

I can hear her muttering under her breath, banging a few
pots and pans around, and fussing about Mary
lounging around with Jesus while she is slaving
over the fire.

Then maybe out of deference to Jesus or maybe because she tries to triangle
him into the sibling dispute, she says,

“Jesus, do you not care that she is not helping me. Tell her to get busy.”

OOOHHHH Martha laid the gauntlet down.

GASP, “Oh no she didn’t”

“Oh yes, she did.”

Martha is fed up.

She is tired of feeling like it is all up to her.

She has the victim mentality, and she begins pointing the finger-
placing her frustration in the lap of Jesus and Mary.

Isn’t that what happens when you and I get overwhelmed and anxious?

The finger-pointing begins.

We cannot manage it all ourselves.

We may try to pull in a third party to help solve our problem.

We cannot manage well under anxiety.

But Jesus doesn’t bite.

He doesn’t have a dog in this fight.

I can hear the kind voice of Jesus saying,

“Martha, Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things.”

Martha is not at fault for not providing hospitality,

but she is wound up tighter than a tick.

She is in a frenzy of worry and distraction.

She is angry and frustrated, but she has made a choice to be so.
And so many of us lead anxious lives.
She is at fault for ignoring her guest more concerned with the tasks.
Hospitality is about welcome and caring for the person, not the duty.

Mary has chosen differently.
She focuses her attention on the friend and her Lord whom she loves.

This week as we anticipated the visit of my friends Becky and George,
even with all that went on at work and getting our children ready for camp
next week,
it was not stressful to be ready for our company.

What mattered most was that our friends were coming to spend time with us.
Sure we made sure the bathrooms were clean and that there was food in
the fridge.

But it was no trouble because we knew that we could have a messy house and
take them to McDonalds,
and we would still have a great time.

Because they are friends whom we love, we just wanted to spend time together.
Becky and I have been known to sit around in our pajamas until 2:00pm
just chatting and laughing.

That has changed a bit since we have families,
but the friendship has not.

We just want to be together enjoying the precious moments we have.

Mary was soaking up Jesus' presence,
enjoying listening to his stories,
really paying attention to what matters.

And for that Jesus says she has chosen the better part.

Jesus wished Martha would just cool her jets, relax, have a seat and listen
to him.

The Lord God just wants us to pause and listen to him.

Our Scripture today is really an extension of last week's text.

When the lawyer asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life.

Jesus asks him what the law requires.

The lawyer answers correctly, "Love the Lord our God with all you heart, with all
your soul, with all your strength, and with all of your mind, and your
neighbor as yourself."

Loving God is just as important as loving your neighbor
as demonstrated in the story of the Good Samaritan.

Mary is taking time to pay attention,
listen, learn, and be with Jesus.

Isn't that what we do when we love someone?
This is what Jesus praises Mary for...for loving God.
We love God by reading and studying God's Word in scripture, by offering
our prayers and praise on a daily basis as well as on Sunday as the
Body of Believers, and even by being quiet and just listening
for God-
paying attention.
Maybe just being still and quiet...something that is in short supply for too many of
us who are driven to distraction.

Jesus says to the lawyer and to you and me, "Go and do likewise."
Wherever you are on the journey of faith and
whatever your worries and distractions,
this is the way to experience eternal life.