

Martha and Mary

5 June 2022

Genesis 18.1-10a

Fifth Sunday after Trinity Colossians 1.15-28

Rev. Alan Keeler

Luke 10.38-end

Home life

I can remember when Gill and I got married and had established our first home. We gave our first invitation to some friends for dinner. There was a sort of awkwardness just after their arrival. I sensed they were looking for direction because they were in our home. They were expecting us to be the hosts and it hadn't crossed my mind this was a role that I now had along with Gill.

Somehow, throughout my life other people had been the host and even though I had had various places I had lived as a student in the preceding years, normally just a room, it wasn't the same as having your own home.

Having guests is a real honour and to be able to provide for them and spend time with them is one of life's great joys. We meet people all the time but there is something different about our homes where we meet people more intimately. There can be a careful negotiation about how they arrange their home life and how we arrange our home life and then making it work.

I can remember having some friends visit us with their children before we had our children. The parents very ably managed the conversations with Gill and I, and also with their youngsters. I can remember feeling quite stretched by this as I had not known young children and felt a bit out of my depth. Their family and the skills of parenthood were quite different from what I was expecting. It was a wonderful time and I remember learning a lot; even if I ended up with a headache!

Martha and Mary

In our gospel reading we have two sisters working out what hospitality means. We read that Martha invited Jesus into her home. Martha and her sister Mary relate to Jesus in different ways. Mary spends time with their guest and gives him attention. Martha still has preparations to do and is upset that it's being left to her. For Martha it is about the meal. For Mary it is about time with their guest and she doesn't want him left alone. Martha is upset and feels left out and left doing the work behind the scenes. She asks Jesus to tell Mary to help her.

I wonder what you think of Jesus' response. In one way Jesus is attentive to Martha and says that she shouldn't worry. In doing this Jesus is saying he knows the meal will get sorted out all in good time. Martha could take it as an encouragement. But he does then say Mary has chosen the better option and this does sound like Martha is neglecting Jesus.

Maybe it's one of those questions that is very hard to answer. You are going to find it difficult whichever reply you receive. Or maybe there are the times when asking Jesus a question is going to give you an answer that is hard to swallow and we have a lesson to learn.

Not enough information

There is a particular thing about this account that leaves me puzzled and it is similar to a couple of other passages where I am left with the same question.

If Mary has chosen the better thing and her time with Jesus was so good why aren't we told what the conversation was about?

Jesus was the great teacher. He gave deep insight into the Jewish law, told wonderful parables and dealt masterfully with duplicitous questions. But we don't know what he said to Mary.

The same thing happens with Zacchaeus where Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus' house. Jesus goes to Zacchaeus' house and after a period of time Zacchaeus reappears a transformed person. He is full of generous restorative action. I would love to know what Jesus said to Zacchaeus. It must have been the most marvellous piece of evangelism, something we all struggle with.

Then there is the account of Cleopas and his friend travelling to Emmaus at the end of the day of the Resurrection. Jesus draws alongside, they do not recognise him, there is a conversation and Jesus talks about the purposes of God. He draws upon Moses, the prophets and all the scriptures. But no details are given. Many people including myself would long to know what Jesus had in mind. But the actual passages are not given.

Jesus gets personal

I like to think there is something being shown to us which is very important. It is not just that the Gospel writers haven't got the information to give. There is something implied which is very exciting about Jesus.

Supposing it is that Jesus had things to say to Mary that were just for her. Supposing what Jesus shared with Zacchaeus is for him alone. What Cleopas and his friend were puzzling over were answered by particular passages from the Bible just for them. The exciting thing is that Jesus is going to relate personally to us as well.

We can take the home is a metaphor for our life. there is that passage in Revelation where Jesus says:

‘Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.’
Revelation 3.20

Martha invites Jesus to enter her home, Zacchaeus accepts Jesus request and in the same way opens his home to Jesus. Cleopas and his friend invite Jesus into their company, share their hearts and their grief. Jesus stands ready for our invitation into our lives.

A personal faith

There are many ways to express our faith. Some of this may be public. The life of church and formal activities mean a great deal to us. But it maybe where we are happy for God to be and we are happy to meet him just there.

It might be we open our lives further. With our lives like our homes. We welcome God into the shared areas. There may be the living room for conversation with him as a guest or the dining room knowing that God meets our needs. But there are private places in our lives which like our homes our guests do not have access to. Even though God is part of our lives there are the times and places where we do not feel comfortable and want him around.

I can remember as a young Christian a preacher saying that God knows us better than we know ourselves. God has a presence that we cannot control. But he respect our dignity and waits for our invitation.

If God is someone that we are still keeping at a distance in some parts of our lives it does beg the question what sort of God we believe in?

Exploring this is about looking at the personal Jesus as we have been doing with Martha and Mary, Zacchaeus and Cleopas and his friend.

I'm fascinated by dramatic adaptations of the gospels because they are going to have to present Jesus with some imagination. They fill in some

gaps to tell the story. I can remember seeing a film where Jesus was dancing. I found this quite unexpected and a bit shocking. I have never been comfortable dancing and I was quite challenged about seeing Jesus enjoy himself in this way. I've got a collection of postcards where people have portrayed Jesus and one in particular attracts me which is of Jesus laughing. I like that. Do we imagine that Jesus cooked? after all he had been a carpenter and he was familiar with practical work. Do we think Jesus ever played games and if he did, did he ever lose?

Called to grow

Through the latter months of 2019 I was beginning to ask St Mary's to join something Rochester Diocese is doing with the title Called to Grow. It is about being people who have a life of faith that they wish to share and for people to join us as a company of believers.

We can find ourselves with many things to be busy about in being a church. It is important to have a life of public worship. We meet people at important times of their lives with baptism wedding and funeral. There is a big task of managing the money and how we look after our buildings. I think Martha would wholeheartedly agree about these being important. There is also the invitation to be like Martha's sister Mary and being very close to Jesus so that people can discover the love of God through us.

Martha and Mary were great friends of Jesus and they had a brother called Lazarus. Jesus has an ability to be trusted by people so they let him into their lives in very deep ways. There was a time when Lazarus fell ill and he died. When Jesus came to meet Martha and Mary he wept. The love of God is something fleshed out in the person of Jesus as we read about him in the gospels. It is an invitation for us to know his presence in a very personal and intimate way.

But this is just the beginning. There are conversations Jesus had with a number of people where do not know the details. In the same way Jesus seeks to be with us in ways individual to who we are. There will be words just for us. He will shed tears just for us. He will join us in dance, laughter, cooking, games and in many more things; just for us. It is out of this richness that we will have good news to share and we will find we will grow as we are called to.