



## 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost

### The Message

Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ, what a joy it is to be here, as we come together to worship and give thanks to God and celebrate the 6th Sunday after Pentecost.

I pray, that today's message, will lift all our spirits, as we journey together, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love. Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Amos's message stands as one of the most powerful Old Testament voices ever to challenge hypocrisy and injustice, and our reading today points directly at social injustice practised by the leaders of God's people then.

Amos talks about greed and deceit in commerce. God especially condemns unjust treatment of the poor. "Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land."

But Israel's response is "But we have never done that. You're exaggerating, God." We can imagine Israel responding, because isn't that how most of us would respond today?

Thus, God gets specific, and says: You can't wait for your holy days to end, so that you can get back to buying and selling (v5). You prefer business to worship, commerce to communion with God. "Greed is good" has become "greed is god." Sounds familiar today?

Not only were their priorities perverted, but so were their practices: "skimping the measure, boosting the price, and cheating with dishonest scales...."

The effect of this widespread deceit, says God, is that the poor and needy end up falling further and further behind, until they need a loan just to make it day to day. They end up being a slave to lender, even to the point of having to use their shabby sandals as pledge on the loan. So, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The bottom line for Israel was that making money was more important than caring for neighbour. The God of the prophets had been replaced by the god of profit. Doesn't this ring so true today!

Our 2nd reading, St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians, St Pauls tells them that Christ

- is the one upon whom we all must model our own lives, and that
- the Lord Jesus as the one who is "before all things,"
- the one through whom and for whom "all things were created,"
- the one in whom "all things hold together."
- Christ is our principle of cohesion, our Mediator and all creation's final destination.

The above also reminds us that by means of his Incarnation, Christ is the head of the body, the Church. He is "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead," and in him the "fullness of God was pleased to dwell."

That "fullness" of divinity shines in all creation and in all humanity, and consequently is the place of all peace, unity and perfect harmony.

What joyful hope, this beautiful passage of scripture gives us, is for us an opportunity to thank the Lord Jesus for freeing us from the darkness of sin, and let it also be for us an encouragement to strive to become true disciples of Christ, "the firstborn of all creation."

So, this connects with our Gospel reading. The story of Mary & Martha.

Hospitality was so important in the biblical world in general, and in Luke's Gospel in particular.

When Jesus comes to Bethany, Martha shows hospitality by welcoming Jesus into the home she shares with her sister Mary. Martha then busies herself with the tasks of serving their guest. Although we are not told exactly what those tasks are, a good guess is that Martha began preparing a meal.

Meanwhile, Mary sits at Jesus' feet, listening to his words. Rather than assuming the role expected of women in her culture, that is we could say "in the kitchen" Mary takes her place at the feet of Jesus. Mary assumes the posture of a student learning at the feet of a rabbi, a role which is traditionally reserved for men.

Now, Martha, distracted by her many tasks, comes to Jesus and asks, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me" (10:40).

Many of us may empathize with Martha's resentment of her sister for leaving her to do all the work. I know I have been guilty of this in my life.

On the other hand, many of us, may cheer for Mary in her reversal of traditional roles.

Jesus' response to Martha is "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her" (10:41-42).

The problem with Martha is not that she is busy serving and providing hospitality. Certainly, Jesus commends this kind of service to the neighbour many times, notably in the parable of the Good Samaritan that immediately precedes the story of Mary and Martha, that was our Gospel reading last Sunday.

The problem with Martha is not her serving, but rather that she is worried and distracted and Martha's distraction and worry leave no room for the most important aspect of hospitality — gracious attention to the guest.

In fact, Martha breaks all the rules of hospitality by trying to embarrass Mary in front of their guest, and by asking their guest to intervene in a family dispute. She even goes so far as to accuse Jesus of not caring about her (Lord, do you not care...?).

Martha's worry and distraction prevent her from being truly present with Jesus, she has missed out on the "one thing needed" for true hospitality. There is no greater hospitality than listening to your guest.

How much more so when the guest is Jesus! So, Jesus says that Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.

Jesus' words to Martha may be seen as an invitation rather than a rebuke. Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing.

The one thing needed is for Martha is to receive the gracious presence of Jesus, to listen to his words, to know that she is valued not for what she does or how well she does it, but for who she is as a child of God.

In our 21st century culture of hectic schedules and the relentless pursuit of productivity, we are tempted to measure our worth by how busy we are, by how much we accomplish, or by how well we meet the expectations of others.

Many of us identify with Martha, feeling pulled in different directions, feeling worried and distracted by many things — these seem to be common threads of life in our fast-paced world.

And yet, as Jesus says in Luke 12:25, "Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" We know that worrying does no good, and that much of what we worry about is not so important in the larger scheme of things, and yet we cannot seem to quell our anxious thoughts and frantic activity.

It is true that much of our busyness and distraction stems from the noblest of intentions.

- We want to provide for our families,
- we want to give our children every opportunity to enrich their lives,
- we want to serve our neighbours,
- and yes, we want to serve Jesus.

Indeed, we could ask where would the church be without its “Marthas,” those faithful people who perform the tasks of hospitality and service so vital to making the church a welcoming and well-functioning community?

And yet if all our activities leave us with no time to be still in God’s presence and hear His word, we are likely to end up anxious and troubled. We are likely to end up with a kind of service that is devoid of love and joy and is resentful of others.

Both listening and doing, receiving God’s Word and serving others, are vital to our Christian life, just as inhaling and exhaling are to breathing. Yet how often do we forget to breathe in deeply?

Trying to serve without being nourished by God’s word is like expecting good fruit to grow from a tree that has been uprooted.

We do know that Jesus invites all of us who are worried and distracted by many things to sit and rest in his presence, to hear his words of grace and truth, to know that we are loved and valued as children of God, to be renewed in faith and strengthened for service.

There is need of only one thing, and that is attention to our guest.

As it turns out, our guest is also our host, with abundant gifts to give. AMEN!