

Readings: Genesis 18:1-10a; Psalm 15; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42

Grace and peace to you from Christ Jesus, in whom no less than the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Amen.

When I lived in Chicago, as I was attending seminary, there was a group of us that got together Thursday nights. We had no agenda, it wasn't a study group. Our only obligation was to eat and talk. It was usually a simple meal. We often cooked soup and bread. Conversation was about anything and everything – religion, politics, love, the great mysteries of life.

Most nights it was a pretty good sized group (10-15 people), but we'd almost always fit around one table. And it was interesting, early in the meal there would be half a dozen different conversations going on around this small table. Two or three people discussed the recent "Church History" test at this corner of the table. The news or the weather or sports were the topics of the conversations at there or four other places around the table.

But one of my favorite moments of those Thursday evenings, usually happened around the time when the soup bowls started to reach "empty" and stomachs were "full." If conversations were bubbles, it was like one small bubble would join with another and another until the whole table was covered with one topic, one conversation, one person speaking at a time. All the conversations merged into one. And in this, there was an indescribable "holiness," an indescribable "wholeness" that enfolded the whole group like a single, fragile bubble.

But I'll admit, I didn't always enjoy these Thursday evening meals. You see, they were often at our apartment and I usually cooked and we probably broke more dishes on Thursday nights in Chicago than I think we have in the four years we've lived here.

But, if I'm honest, it wasn't really the broken dishes or the work. When I didn't enjoy myself, it usually had more to do with me than anyone else. I was worried or distracted by an upcoming test or something a professor had said or maybe I was struggling with mid-winter depression.

But, of course, the conversation that played out in my mind, was almost word for word the conversation Martha has with Jesus in our Gospel reading: "Doesn't anyone appreciate *all the work I did by myself?! Why*

does he always have to dominate conversation, *can't he be quiet for just one minute?!* Who does he think he is, *he hasn't offered to do dishes now for the last three Thursdays?!*" (Oh, *I kept track*).

Our readings for today, especially the Gospel and first readings, all center around meals and *hospitality*. And let's be clear from the start, what Jesus says and doesn't say. Jesus doesn't say in the reading for today, "Stop working so much, can't you just sit down and take a break, the dishes'll take care of themselves!" We can all use a break, a vacation, a *Sabbath* now and then; but just as we are baptized into one Christian community, we are also called to work and to serve (it's quite clear in so many other stories and teachings throughout the bible)... so guys, you're not going to get out of doing the dishes that easily.

But no, when we read carefully our Gospel story for today, we get clues about the very specific situation that Jesus is responding to. I don't know how else you can read Martha's accusation of Jesus, than dripping with sarcasm like molasses on a spoon, "Jesus, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!?" Do you hear the *resentment, weariness, distraction, bitterness, even jealousy*.

It sort of reminds me of the way we sometimes speak to one person, but we're really talking to somebody else. It's never a good thing, is it?

"Somebody's not eating their vegetables, are they?" I say to my wife at the dinner table as my two-year-old plays with his food. "Someone's not going to get dessert, is he?" This is, of course, the 'soft' form of talking about someone "behind their back." The 'hard' form is only slightly different name. The person about whom we're talking isn't there at all. And you can call it what it is: "gossip."

...but I'm probably getting "distracted by many things." What is the "one thing" about which Jesus speaks? What exactly is the "better part" that "Mary has chosen" according to Jesus? I wonder if the back door into this story from Luke isn't the first reading from Genesis; and like a lot of back doors on houses, it takes us on a trip through the kitchen.

But the story starts as Abraham sits at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day when he notices three strangers. You might remember that Abraham and his wife Sarah just had a name change. Even though they were old and wandering with few possessions, God promised Abram and Sarai children and land, and new names were a reflection of that promise.

Abraham and Sarah though (like all of us), go back and forth in the chapters of Genesis between acting like they trust this promise and acting like they know there isn't a snowballs chance in July it's gonna happen.

But this day in this story, Abraham is in good form. He doesn't seem worried or distracted. Instead, he sees three strangers and everything he does focuses on this one thing – playing host to them. Action verb after action verb – Abraham *sees* them, he *runs* to meet them, he *bows down* to greet them, he *hastens* into the tent and then gets Sarah involved in cooking a meal; he *runs* to the herd, he *takes* a calf, he *gives* it to the servant who also *hastens* and *prepares* it. Next, Abraham *takes* curds and milk and the prepared calf and *sets* it before them. And finally, there is one more verb – he *stands by them under a tree* (the oaks of Mamre) *while the strangers eat*.

Sounds to me like Abraham is even busier than Martha in our Gospel story today. But we lift up Abraham as a model of faithful living and even in the story he gets a blessing from his guest and what does Martha get? Chastised. So what's going on here? I wonder if it is this one thing – Abraham knows when to stop, Martha doesn't. Abraham (at least at this moment) knows the difference between entertaining and hospitality.

Martha comes out the kitchen door with a sarcastic, snide, back-sided comment that borders on gossip, “Jesus, aren't you all going to do something? Do I have to do everything by myself?!” No doubt, I can't help wonder if Martha wasn't still ticked at Mary for breaking her best cooking pot a few days ago.

But Abraham recognizes the “holy” moment, the moment when time is made “whole” and he stops his work, steps back, and waits for a blessing.

Isn't this the art of life? Knowing when to work and when to rest? Knowing when to bless someone else and when to sit there and wait for a blessing? When to give and when to receive. When to play host and serve the meal to the stranger and when to play guest and sit down and eat in a stranger's house, even if the food is strange, even if the language is foreign.

But it's even more than that, isn't it? It's knowing when to live to yourself and when to die to yourself. When to call in a loud voice for the world around you to change and when to whisper in humility, *I am ready to change*, because you know that sometimes you can't wait for the world.

For in Christ Jesus, “no less than the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Christ, God was pleased to reconcile to God’s self all creation, by making peace through the blood of the cross.”

In life and in death, Christ Jesus shows us how to live and gives us new life, literally by hosting God. It’s like someone sitting at the door of their dwelling place – at the edge of their body – and inviting the stranger into their home for a meal and waiting for a blessing. Christ Jesus, in his life and in his death, in his teaching and in his service, invites and allows God to dwell in him richly. Jesus the Christ plays host for God. Isn’t this what it means for Jesus to be divine?

It’s not something that you read about in an essay, it’s something you learn... sometimes by having a stranger over for supper and sometimes by sitting in a stranger’s home and eating strange food. It’s hard to explain, but it reminds me of the hospitality seven of us from Custer Lutheran Fellowship received in homes in Bogota, Colombia a little over a month ago.

Her name was Miriam Isabel and she lived in her small home with her 74 year old mother, Silenia. She served coffee and a fruit called “granadilla” – a fruit like none that I’ve ever eaten in my life. Some of you might have seen the video on the church’s blog of Sam trying to swallow the slippery insides of a granadilla which I have to say is sort of like sweet mucus.

After we ate and laughed together Miriam Isabel, told us about her life. How she had two sons, only one who was living, the other had been mugged and killed on his way home one night from work, another victim of *La Violencia* (The Violence). She spoke about the work that she did to earn enough money to put food on her table. She would get up early in the morning, prepare food and sell it around her neighborhood. On Sunday mornings she got up at something like 4 a.m. so that she could do all of her work before joining friends for worship at San Pablo Lutheran Church.

You don’t have to travel to Colombia, of course, to share a meal with a stranger or with Jesus Christ. Today, here at this table, you are invited to come. Come and rest your weary soul and eat and drink. You can leave it here. Your resentment, your weariness, your bitterness, your jealousy, or just your distractions. You don’t have to explain it to me or anyone else. You don’t have to speak the right words or even think the right thoughts. Just come and participate in something. One small thing, that is so much larger than yourself – just one person. And see if it isn’t something “holy” and “whole” that can never be taken away from you. Amen.