

Pentecost 6C, Proper 11

July 17, 2022

All Saints', Littleton, NH

The Rev. Curtis Metzger

Amos 8: 1-12

Psalm 52

Colossians 1: 15-28

Luke 10: 38-42

This morning we have an interesting selection of readings, continuing on in the book of Amos, in Colossians, and in the gospel of Luke. Amos is still reading the riot act to the northern Kingdom of Israel, its king and the wealthy class. He accuses them of concentrating wealth in too few hands and enslaving and cheating the poor and needy, which is against the commands of Yahweh. Perhaps we need an Amos in our own day to hold us to account also. Clearly the concentration of wealth in too few hands has become a problem for the democracy.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians we hear a passage that is part poetry and mystery and profound early Christology; and part an explanation of the good news that Christ came for the Gentile too...."To them God chose

to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

But today I really want to focus on the gospel and this wonderful little story of Mary and Martha. Now, you may think that as someone who practices contemplative prayer---sitting at Jesus’ feet as it were – this would be an opportunity for me to praise Mary and criticize Martha. But hold on! There is so much more to this story than proclaiming sitting at Jesus’ feet and contemplative prayer. Certainly, this story is definitely a teaching about taking time to slow down, stop, and listen and contemplate, and to pay attention to the folk that are around you and with you now. Yesterday I buried a parishioner from my previous parish that I expected to see many more times. She was only 75....and suddenly, as I’m pushing 65, that doesn’t sound so old anymore. There is a lesson here about stopping with busyness and enjoying people while you have them.

But remember the lesson from last Sunday that precedes this story in Luke: the good Samaritan. It was the priest and Levite, the priestly class that passed by, but it was a simple faithful Samaritan who did the good work of taking care of the wounded man. So it is not as simple as saying

that God prefers us in prayer. Throughout the history of Christian monasticism in both male and female orders there has been a little tug of war between the Marys and the Marthas, with some orders being more contemplative and some being more 'active' or 'apostolic' as it is sometimes called. But as in all things, there is balance. Unfortunately, as religious people we generally do have a tendency to think that to be faithful we always need to be busy doing God's work. Yet, here is Jesus clearly teaching the importance of stopping and listening.

An important thing to note about this incident is that rabbis did not allow woman to sit with them and learn, so Jesus was breaking through on social and religious custom in going to these women's home and allowing one to sit and listen to him. Actually, if I were Jesus, I would have taken the pot holder and the dish towel from Martha, told her to sit down, and given the pot holder and the dish towel to Peter and John and said, 'your turn, boys, get to it'!....and then turned to Martha and said, 'Martha, you are so very much more than all you could ever do for me!, so let go and rest and let's just bask in each other's company!'

In my 'sitting at Jesus' feet' this week and contemplating this good story I was reminded again of the goodness of resting in God. And yet my mind strayed to the photos of the deep space telescope that we saw in the news. Wow! It is hard to comprehend the wonder and the beauty of the universe with so many galaxies and suns and emerging stars and worlds. I think they said that the light we are seeing of these entities so many light years away, is already billions of years old. It really just blows the mind!

So where is God out there? Well, if we are still clinging to childish notions that God is in the sky somewhere, I hope this helped you let go of them! God is not in the sky! As theologians have tried to explain to our limited understanding, God is not 'a being', but rather God is 'being itself'. Let that sink in for a minute. Rest and contemplate that for a moment. It really challenges our tendency to anthropomorphize God.

When we close our eyes and dial in 'God' I think the most authentic understanding of this is opening our minds and hearts to the very nature of the creative force of the universe that binds all together. Saints and mystics and those who have had near death experiences have been telling us the same thing.

When Amos is chastising Israel for their treatment of the poor, it comes from that mystical understanding of the unity of all things and all people created in God's image. If we thwart that in policy and treatment of the poor and needy it is breaking with the one who is the unity of all things.

When Paul is telling the Colossians that the Christ was from the beginning and revealing God through all time and now breaking through to the whole world, Paul is stepping into this mystical flow of the unity of all beings in God....and the mystery of 'Christ in you, the hope of glory'.

To appreciate this mystery, we do need to slow down, unplug, and sit at the feet of the one who, as St. Paul says a little later in his letter to the Colossians , ' Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. [Col. 3:11] When we take our Mary time, we then rise infused with the Christ, we are 'in Christ', and our work for his sake in the world becomes 'the hope of glory' .....and all creation waits with eager longing to see the children of God come into their own'! (Rom 8:19) Hallelujah!

