

### Responding to the Love of Christ

Our two readings tell us about the love of Christ. One the extravagant, enormity of it and the other about possible responses.

Just because our gospel reading focuses on two sisters, please men, do not think this is an opportunity for you to switch off thinking there won't be anything relevant for me in this talk. You might be surprised!

I don't know if you've noticed but Luke's gospel loves to challenge us with the radical nature of Jesus. He is so counter cultural! Just before our story Luke places the parable of the Good Samaritan, the 1st century listeners would have been shocked to the core. It was their hated, sworn enemy the Samaritan who was the one who pleased God, by showing love and kindness, to the wounded man at the side of the road, not the "good" Jews. Following straight on our 4 verses about Martha and Mary. Here again all convention is defied. "How dare a young girl sit with the men, acting like a student of the rabbi". I can even imagine the disciples themselves, who had called in at Lazarus's home to break their journey, bristling with frustration, thinking "How can Jesus think this is ok, a girl sitting with us?. Why doesn't he send her away?." But Mary, herself, is so captivated by Jesus she is oblivious to the tension around her.

Later Martha boldly interrupts Jesus teaching saying "Lord, don't you care..."(I wonder if we have ever said those words to Jesus?) Martha is asking Jesus to tell Mary to help her. The disciples thinking "Oh good, Mary will leave us now, back to the kitchen where she belongs". The answer Jesus gives is totally unexpected. "Martha, Martha", ( Let's just stop here a moment, in the past I thought Jesus was telling Martha off, but I've come to see that Jesus isn't like that, He knew Martha was trying to do something generous, preparing rooms and a meal for them, but he needs to kindly point out that her priorities are different to His. He doesn't want to shame her, so he gently says) "Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed- or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her".

Do we, like the disciples and Martha, think we know what Jesus should do? But yet again Jesus floors us showing that His ways are not our ways, His thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa 55:8).

I feel I've got quite a lot of Martha in me. I imagine her standing there doing a John McEnroe "Lord, you cannot be serious"! But Jesus couldn't be more serious. The road to life, true life, real life will always be to choose Jesus, to spend time with Him, to listen to Him, and not be distracted by the busyness of human activity.

I love to cook and entertain but I have to keep myself in check otherwise I'll exhaust myself before my guests even arrive. One Christmas, in particular, comes to mind. I was wearing myself out trying to prepare a sumptuous feast. My son said to me " For goodness sake Mum, do you think they will even notice the difference between a Chocolate log that is homemade and a shop brought one!" What was my underlying motivation? Why was I going to so much trouble?

I return to the phrase which I have always found so useful, it was Sean Doherty who first said it to me. "Human motivation is always mixed". On the one hand I was wanting to show my guests how much I cared for them, preparing a delicious meal was a gift of love, but on the other, I wanted to

impress them with my culinary skills and gain their praise. Could this have been what was going on for Martha? Thinking she was honouring Jesus by her actions when He just wanted her to be with Him, to give Him her attention.

In contrast to us, God's motivation is never mixed. His motivation is always love even when we can't feel it, or make sense of it. That's why St Paul prays for us to be able to grasp that God's love for us is wider, longer, higher, and deeper than anything else, so much so that it surpasses knowledge. We can't get our heads around it. All we can do is choose to believe it's true.

What's the motivation that pleases Jesus? What about service? Aren't we called to work to extend the kingdom of God here on earth? Isn't service what Martha was doing by looking after Jesus and his followers? So often we can exhaust ourselves doing what we hope is work for God ( at times I'm sure the Transforming Trinity team feel exhausted! ) Are we doing what Jesus wants? Are we following His lead?(This is why our daily what's app prayer is so useful, continuously offering this project to God).

But don't you find we so often forge ahead on our own, thinking we know best. Why do we do it? Are we hoping to get brownie points with the Lord? Surely our work for God is best when it is in response to our awareness of His love for us? His love leading our action. Remember, nothing we can do can make God love us more and nothing we can do can make God love us less.

Worship is always an appropriate response to the presence of Jesus. Giving Him our attention. This is what Mary chooses to do by sitting, listening to Him.

Can we fall into the trap of thinking we have to prove ourselves worthy to be loved?  
I think we do it all the time. Well I do!

There is a real gift in Jesus' words "Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her". When we choose Jesus, choose to follow Him, I believe He will eternally honour that choice. Despite our wavering, our times of doubt and fear, we will always be secure in Him, He will never cast us out.

A final thought! Martha took the responsibility for looking after her guests, including preparing a meal. In this story she was taking the role of host. But in reality it's not us who are the host. It's Jesus! We don't offer Him a meal, He offers us one- the Eucharist!  
Amen

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