

## **Mary & Martha - radical inclusion discipleship & making space**

Psalm 15; Gen 18:1-10a; Colossians 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42

### **Bible Sunday July 2010**

#### Contents:

- Introduction
- Radical Inclusion
- Discipleship
- Making Space

Today's gospel reading at a first glance presents what seems to be a universal point of tension: housework. It is inescapable, living with other people goes hand in hand with conflict or at the very least "robust discussion" over who does the dishes, who cooks who cleans and who takes out the rubbish. We are presented with the plight of Mary and Martha, two sisters who host Jesus and his followers in their house. Mary goes into the lounge to hang out with the boys while Martha rushes around "distracted by many tasks", in other words doing all the cooking and cleaning making the house presentable. She eventually gets so fed up that she goes and interrupts Jesus and in front of all the guests requests that he tell Mary to get off her bum and give her a hand.

We cannot help but feel sorry for Martha especially when Jesus tells her to give Mary a break and says that "she has chosen the better part, and that it will not be taken away from her". Just what is going on here? ...obviously something more than what meets the eye.

## **Inclusiveness**

This story is about more than an inequitable division of household chores. It tells us something of the radical inclusiveness of the kingdom of God.

In Jesus' day, as it still is in many cultures, there was a clear and unambiguous been the roles of men and women.

For example, the kitchen and washing rooms were the space of women and the living area was the room where the men meet to discuss important issues and topics. Also, women were not permitted to become the disciples of a rabbi. This was a man's role since you became the disciple of a rabbi only if you yourself wanted to be a rabbi like your teacher.

So for Mary to sit and learn at the feet of Jesus is scandalous. Mary is acting as if she were a man. She is sitting and learning about the kingdom of God so that she can become a messenger and teacher of the word of God.

Jesus gives his blessing to this and states that it will not be taken away from her. For those present in the house and when the gossip spread, it must have been truly revolutionary. Jesus was breaking down the barriers between men and women.

This speaks of the radically inclusive nature of Jesus' and the church's mission, to call *all* of humanity to be reconciled to God and to each other. As we heard in our reading from Colossians, God's call and intimacy with God is open to all – even to those outside of Israel.

This is also clearly stated by Paul in his letter to the Galatians. When reminding them of the significance of their baptism he writes:

For in Christ you are *all* children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew

or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for you are *all* one in Christ Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

This means that in the community of Jesus there is no hierarchy on the basis of gender, race or ethnicity. We are all loved and valued because we are children of God.

## **Discipleship**

Yet while we live in a society that values “inclusiveness”, we need to understand here that the inclusiveness Jesus offers is a challenge to our ideas of what inclusiveness is about. Inclusiveness here, is a call to *discipleship* and to *become like Jesus*.

When Mary sat at the feet of Jesus it was not just to show how tolerant and progressive he was (as a kind of first century male feminist). Jesus was teaching about the healing and restorative Kingdom of God and the response that was required from those that would enter it.

Immediately prior to this story Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan,<sup>2</sup> in which he declares that everyone, even our enemies, are our neighbours and should be objects of our love. (Jesus’ other challenging and demanding call for his followers to take up their cross and follow him in costly discipleship also comes to mind here).<sup>3</sup>

Costly discipleship requires us to *give preference the needs of others* and to *give of ourselves*, even at risk to ourselves, reflecting the great love that God has shown to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

---

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 3:27-28.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 10:25-37.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 9:23.

How do we do this?

## **Making Space**

A key challenge is for us to take a lead from Mary and to spend time “at the feet of Jesus”. Two of the ways we can do this is through prayer and bible reading. However in attempting to do this we run across the problem of our busy lives. Being busy is often seen as a status symbol as business equals importance.

As such spending time praying and contemplating the words of Jesus and the life he calls us to live can be inconvenient and frustrating, and even apparently unrewarding. Yet these are activities we should encourage ourselves and each other to do. In saying “should”, I am not here intending to drop a guilt trip on anyone. I, for one, find these difficult habits to maintain. I guess the real question is how do we as disciples of Jesus cultivate a love and desire to spend time with him and open our lives to be challenged and formed by God.

Mary wasn't skiving. She had chosen to be different. It can't have been easy for her to break the mould, to go out on a limb, in her quest to hear Jesus' teaching. In doing so she laid herself open to misinterpretation and rejection. Perhaps the challenge for us as a faith community is to create a space in our life together where, along with service, prayer, bible study and discipleship, are nurtured and truly valued as “the better part”.

In the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.