

**Text: Luke 10: 38-42; Amos 7:7-17**

**Sermon: Few things are needed, indeed only one**

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**Introduction:**

As we approach this familiar story in Luke's gospel, my heart sinks.

- Even though it has some important themes of hospitality.
- Even though it highlights relational tensions in the midst of everyday circumstances.

This passage of Luke's gospel has also been read in ways that have increased the tension in community – creating binary oppositions between people.

Labelling some tasks as more holy than others.

As interpreter Pat Bennet writes – “readings which have then themselves become a driver of resentments or divisions, particularly with respect to the role of women”.

Consider the following questions:

- Have you ever been labelled/or labelled someone else as a ‘Martha’ or a ‘Mary’?
  - What did you understand or mean by the phrase?
  - How did you – or they – respond?
  - Do you think such labels, or what they encode are helpful in any way?
    - If so – how? If not – why not?
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The story as we read today hinges on the words of Jesus to 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”,

This leaves Martha (and whatever she is seen as representing) distinctly and decisively in the wrong and humiliated. All the work she has done seems to be what is labelled as the ‘distraction’.

Digging a little deeper into Biblical scholarship we see a second stream of textual tradition. A slightly longer version (which appears in the NIV and the 1977 version of the NASB) which reads: “you are worried and upset about many things, **but few things are needed – or indeed only one.**”

Perhaps the actions of these two women are not in opposition with each other?

And if we look into the word translated as ‘distracted’ the sense of the Greek word is more akin to the word ‘cumbered’ and indicates a state of being weighed down.

Perhaps Martha is not so much being compared to Mary because of what she is offering, but rather the way that she is doing it - this is a picture of someone whose attention is being so pulled in multiple directions that they can no longer focus properly on any of them and everything is muddled and she experiences overwhelm.

In this story, Martha and Mary both have tasks – different tasks to do that requires their focus and energy.

Being present to their unique gifts, talents, and callings.  
And NOT comparing themselves to each other.  
And NOT trying to squeeze one into the other's mould.  
For if we do, we lose.

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**Let's take a second example:**

Amos

In the Hebrew scriptures we are introduced to a prophet named Amos.  
Described to us as the Tender of Sycamore Trees, and a herdsman.  
A man who comes from remote places, outside of the King's palace and the Priests temple.

And he brings his unique perspective to the attention of the King of Israel's Northern Kingdom – a split that happened after the reign of King Solomon.  
(These tribes of Israel would soon be captured by Assyria. And in Jesus time, these tribes are referred to as Samaritans).

Amos had courage.

He is described as a 'seer'  
He 'sees' precisely because his work and context are different from the Priests and King's prophets of the time.

He delivers his message at a time of seeming peace.  
He holds up a plumbline as the justice of God.  
And declares that the nation are measuring themselves against principles of prosperity that are not in line with God's desire for mercy and justice.

And he is rejected and asked to leave and go to prophesy to the other tribes of Israel (Judah).  
His words and perspective are so challenging, the Priest couldn't bear it.

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In our time – the challenges are myriad. And overwhelming.  
Everything feels unhinged. It feels like the dust is still settling – we are not yet sure what a post COVID era will be. Or the full impact of the Russian/Ukraine conflict.  
There is much despair.  
Some small communities are flourishing, others are dwindling.  
It is so easy to try to be pragmatic and look at the people, businesses and communities that are experiencing prosperity and to attempt to mould ourselves to them.

- To set up a plumb line of prosperity... or... success
- In our feelings of helplessness and self doubt - to relinquish our unique gifts and copy others.

More than ever, more than ever!

In this time, the invitation before us:

- is to **stay focused** to what is before us.
- And to **bring the best of ourselves** (that which we were created to be) to shine light on the situation at hand.

**To trust that we are here. You are here. I am here.**

To trust that God has brought US here together for this time.

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One way that I find helpful to stay grounded is to work with a spiritual director or counsellor to continually discover the gift that I am bringing to the situation.

They have helped me to listen to my deepest self – beyond the labels that I have been given by others.

When family or peers have put a negative label on something – it is often because that is precisely the challenging thing I am bringing to a situation and will be my gift to the world.

I remember as a young person being called ‘too sensitive’.

And so I tried to toughen up.

And then later in a leadership training, being taught that is precisely that sensitivity, ‘listening to the subtle messages in the room’ that was needed in facilitation.

Friends you, are deeply loved just as you are.

Mind, Body and Heart.

And the ways that you experience and connect with God and love your neighbour are unique and need to be treasured.

- The different prayer practices – prayers committed to memory, silence, poetry, scripture, nature, walking labyrinths
  - The different ways of learning – reading, listening, conversations, kinesthetic and visual learning, trial and error,
  - The different forms of service – prayer circle, visitation, phone calls, making tea, helping someone move, advocating for a people in need, contributing money to a cause, managing a project.
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I end with a poem by Steve Garnaas Holmes

No matter the results and outcomes, the thousand possibilities, you are here now.

Why even try to trace what the beggar will do with your money? Let your giving be the whole horizon.

Be lovingly present and wars and stars and grief and cats alike will be unable to trouble you.

At the center of the world and in each breath this is the holy temple, the birthing moment: giving and receiving love. That is all.

This is the sacred point, the love in you meeting the love in the world.

However broken or weary you are, bring yourself here, in love, now.

**Steve Garnaas-Holmes Unfolding Light**

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