

I've been doing a lot of study and reflection this past year and a half about the importance of space, and more specifically, creating space. Because the truth is, I'm not always very good at creating space. In addition to church-related ministries and events, our family schedule is full, as I'm sure many of yours are as well. Baseball practice. Dance recitals. Dental appointments – for us and for our dogs because that's a thing. The list goes on. The point is, we're busy. We're all busy. Everyone is busy. And the thing is, research seems to suggest that human beings need something that drives us, some kind of work or task that helps us to put our knowledge, gifts, and abilities to use. It's good for us. It gives us a sense of purpose and meaning. But research also suggests that there's a link between our level of busyness and feelings of stress, worry, and anxiety. It seems that the busier we are, the more anxious we become.

Which is difficult, because we're often so driven by the things we do. The most difficult part of the faith isn't so much who can do it better, but in accepting that the grace and love of God are completely and totally given to us without any effort of our own. We want to do something, we want to feel like we've contributed, we want to feel worthy of it in some way. But just as the grace and love of God in Christ is given freely, so also we must remember that a life of faith is not just about the work we do, but also in the space we allow, trusting that the Holy Spirit does in fact move and act in the world, spreading the grace and love of God, even without our efforts.

In our Gospel text today, we have the classic story of Mary and Martha. Mary sits at Jesus' feet, attentively listening to him as a disciple would while Martha is busy with her many tasks of service and hospitality. And often when we hear this story, we feel like we should choose: are we Mary or Martha? But I don't think that's the intent. It's not about being one or the other. Because we have to remember that just prior to this, Jesus sent out 72 followers to do the work of ministry. And he did just tell a parable about a Samaritan who went above and beyond for the sake of his neighbor, and commanding us to do likewise. And now, he's lifting up Mary as a symbol of faithfulness as she sits at his feet. So which is it?

Well, we have to listen carefully to what Jesus says to Martha because it's really not a word of condemnation. Jesus isn't scolding her. He cares about Martha and his words to her reflect a level of concern for her. "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things." She's become so busy that the work has become the most important thing to her and she's starting to let the anxiety she feels take over. But when Jesus speaks to her, he's calling her to leave that behind. He's inviting her to be present in the space they're in and not worry about the things she thinks have to get done. You see, sometimes we convince ourselves that the work couldn't possibly happen without us or that if it's left to a later time, it will be too late, and we'll have failed. Sometimes, we get anxious, like this whole Kingdom of God promise is completely dependent on us.

In the section of Luther's "Small Catechism" on The Lords' Prayer, specifically regarding the petitions, "Your kingdom come" and "Your will be done", twice Luther states a freeing truth: "God's kingdom and God's will come about on their own, even without our prayers." In other words, it's not up to us. The promise of God's kingdom, the promise of God's will done in the world is for you. It is not dependent on you. God's promise of a kingdom built of love and, the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, where every tear will be wiped away, and suffering and death will be no more, will happen – even without our own efforts. God's got this. And for as much as we talk about the importance of being called by God to take on the work of ministry in the world, perhaps we should also remember that it's not all up to us. And sometimes, the most faithful thing we could do is not more, but less. To allow space for God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to move and act, space to watch attentively and be amazed at the new life taking shape around us.

So I mentioned that I've been studying and thinking and reflecting a lot about the importance of space. Well last fall, we finally decided to put some of this into action – call it a holy experiment, if you will. Ordinarily on Wednesday nights, our confirmation time is jam-packed. From the moment youth arrived to the moment they were picked up, everything was focused and driven by that day's lesson. So this past year, we asked ourselves, "What would happen if we actually allowed space for the youth – say for the first half hour? No agenda, no lesson, no schedule. Just space for the youth to do whatever they needed."

Some would go outside and play games, others would stay inside and chat with friends. Some even asked if we could set up a karaoke lounge here in the sanctuary, to which the answer was a resounding heck yes! But even more than all this, we began to notice something amazing happening. Whereas in previous years, there had always been a sharp divide between 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade groups, this year we had 1 cohesive group. It didn't really matter what grade you were in because everyone was connecting to others in ways that transcended grade level. They were connecting with one another as individual people, creating bonds through shared hobbies and interests, life stories of successes and challenges, and the mutual experience of playing games or singing songs. It was this beautiful realization of what it looks like to be a community, a tight-knit group, a family.

My friends in Christ, there is much work to be done in the world. And I am so grateful for each and every one of you and the ways you live out the Gospel and share the love of Jesus with your neighbors through your words and actions. But today, let us also remember the space the Gospel provides us. We are free in Christ and by faith we can trust and believe and hold fast to the promise of the Kingdom, not because of who we are, but because of who God is. In faith, we are called to leave room, to watch and see what God does next. In faith, we become less, so that the love and grace of God in Christ Jesus may become more. Amen.