

WESTMINSTER CHURCH
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario P6A 3B5

*“Trusting God, nurturing disciples for Christ,
being empowered by the Holy Spirit”*

July 17th, 2022

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

...We Gather to Worship God...

Call to Worship: from Psalm 52

We trust in God’s unfailing love forever and ever.

We will praise you forever for what you have done.

In your name we will hope, for your name is good.

Let us worship God.

Announcements: We are glad you are with us today and welcome your online voices joining with us.

Birthday Train: We are pleased to acknowledge Nicolene Hoffman who is having a birthday tomorrow, July 18th. Happy Birthday to you and may our Lord richly bless you on your birthday!

Offerings and Tithes: Our Session would like to encourage our members and friends to prayerfully consider your contributions to our ongoing ministry here at Westminster. Contributions may be made in person, by mail, or by e-transfer to office@westminsterchurch.ca. We thank you for your continued support and prayers.

Hymn: 314 - God is love: come heaven, adoring

Opening Prayer: Prayer of Lament (based on Amos 5)

Holy, Perfect God, we admit that we put other things above you in our lives. We say we long for you, but we actually long for more money and more comfort.

Lord, you will come with darkness for us if our hearts remain captive to anything but you.

We confess that we are openly rebellious against you.

We are fallen, never to rise again unless you lift us up.

Lord, we have failed to worship you with our hearts.

Our religious gatherings are hollow because our hearts are slaves to lesser things.

We pay you a visit on Sunday, but we long to go home to our other things.

Lord God, we confess that we break your heart.

We gather before you half-heartedly, waiting to go back to worshipping ourselves.

When we truly worship you, we will seek good and not evil.

We will hate evil and love good.

Lord God, have mercy.

Renew our hearts within us.

Make us long for you, our God.

Remind us to pray as you taught your disciples, saying ‘Our Father, who art in heaven ...

Amen.

...We Listen to God's Word...

Word of God:

Old Testament: Amos 5: 14-15

New Testament: Luke 10: 38-42

Hymn: 399 - Spirit, spirit of gentleness

Message:

Have you ever said to God, 'Don't you care?' I think it has been a question that has been launched at God several times. I am sure it shows up in many of the psalms. Don't you care? I know that the people of God when they were in the wilderness and following Moses asked this question often. "Lord, don't you care that we have no fresh water?" "Lord, don't you care that we have no food?" Then there is Jonah of Jonah and the whale, 'Lord, don't you care that those people are so cruel?' Then there are the Israelite people during the diaspora asking the question 'Lord, don't you care that we are living in captivity?'

And then we have our reading from this morning with Martha saying, "Lord, don't you care, that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

It is summer and this is part of my summer series. A story of two sisters. It seems appropriate as summer is the time that many families get together and sisters have time to share the same space again. Now, I have three brothers and no sisters so I have never been part of this scenario that is presented in this passage from the gospel of Luke but I bet some of you have lived through this scenario. Hands?? Mom, don't you care that my sister is being lazy? Mom, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work? Mom... And in case the men are feeling left out, I am sure that this question was phrased this way often enough - Dad, don't you care that I was left doing all the work and my brother did nothing? I think I can hear this voice shouting quite often even now.

Now you may have noticed that I have framed this story a little differently than you are used to hearing. I feel it is necessary to do this because I don't think

that the story is about presenting two kinds of women - those who like to study and those who like to be busy doing something. Both reading/studying and being active are important parts of anyone's life.

I realize that this has been an important story historically for women because it gave many women the justification to follow their hopes that they could study theology. Mary, Jesus said, had chosen what was better, and it would not be taken away from her. A movie that I quite enjoyed was Barbara Streisand's picture entitled 'Yentl'. It was the story of a Rabbi living in Poland with his daughter. While he taught boys how to study the Torah during the day, he taught his daughter how to study the Torah in the evenings. She loved studying Torah. The story continues with her finally immigrating to America where she would have an opportunity to continue her theological studies which was not possible in Poland. I also remember meeting and speaking with Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, a woman who studied theology at the University of Wurzburg. Since we had been on the topic of women studying theology, I asked her if it was difficult. She said the worst was exams. There were no female washrooms in the school. Not one. So one had to think about these things as one prepared to write a three hour exam essay. There were no accommodations made for the one or two women who were studying with the men. Women have had a difficult time being recognized for their work in theology. It is not there were no women writers as I had once thought. The books which women published were simply not kept to the same degree that others were. So it is difficult to find the writings of Christian women thinkers. So I do understand why this passage is valued by many. Mary is recognized for choosing to listen to Jesus' teachings.

However, this is not meant to devalue the work that Martha was doing. I love this comment I found by the Reformed theologian and Anglican priest, John Mayer. "We should not follow Mary's example, except in sermons." This was in the 1600's. Mary was only allowed to study for a very limited time! Rev. John Mayer was fairly sure that work was very important and needed to be done.

So what is happening in this passage? Well, to start with, Martha is not happy. She is being sort of peevish and whiny - whinnying I have always thought was a good term. If she were truly angry, I think that she would have simply yelled at her sister. This is trying to get Jesus to side with her against her sister. This

is using Jesus as leverage in getting him to tell Mary that she has to help her sister with preparations. Have you ever done something like that? I would even bet that Mary was in the room. Martha could have spoken to Mary directly for help but instead she recruits Jesus to make her demand. Have you been the Mary, sitting there minding your own business only to find out that you were doing something wrong in someone else's eyes? That is not fun either.

And Jesus, well he also is suddenly in the wrong. He is accused of not caring. Jesus probably did not know that Martha was overwhelmed with her responsibilities of hosting. Did he care? Of course he cared. Did he know that Martha wanted or needed some help? Probably not. How could he know when she had not asked?

Martha is in a state. Someone has labeled it 'a stormy anxiety'. There is so much to do and so little time. How others cannot see this is incomprehensible to her. Also, if Martha felt that she had a choice, she would be like Mary. She would be listening to Jesus. You see, I think this anxiety is also jealousy. Martha wants to be doing what Mary is doing. Not because she perceives Mary as relaxing or lazy but because she wants to be taught by Jesus as well. Martha however is torn. There are expectations in her culture as to what hospitality looks like. There are things that need to be sorted out. What are they going to eat? Where is Jesus going to sleep? Is the bedding clean? Where are the fresh towels?

Do you know those times when you have so much going on in your head that you do not know what you really want? I know I do. Instead of taking the time to figure out what I really want to be doing, I throw out the question to whomever is around me in the house "Do you not care that you are not helping me ...?" I am sure you can fill in the blank. Even when they come to help it does not always lessen the anxiety or frustration because sometimes I did not really want help. I wanted to be doing what they were doing. Throwing the question out this way does not bring anyone closer to me either. There is anger and frustration and this question is created to make those people who are being addressed angry as well. Though I am asking for help, I am really pushing people away.

My question to them should have been 'Could you help me finish this so I can join you in what you are doing?' This question gives room for a caring, loving,

creative response.

Thankfully, Jesus is patient and listens to Martha. He hears what she is saying. However, he knows that Martha needs to become aware of what she really wants to do. She is waffling between the two choices or chooses what she believes is expected of her over what she desires. Jesus shows Martha that Mary chose one thing and she chose wisely. Mary can be trusted to know what is best sometimes.

I am sure that once Jesus and Mary became aware of what Martha was wanting and needing that they did help. I am sure that they were not purposely expecting her to do all of the preparation by herself. She simply needed to make them aware of what she wanted to be doing and that she needed help with what needed to be done.

When you find yourself saying “Lord, don’t you care that my sister or my friend or those people” know that God does hear you. God will respond. However, God may also make you take the time to work out what you truly desire. If you take the time to do this then you will be able to see God’s response more effectively and so will others around you! And you will know that there is empathy, there is caring and there is love.

...We Respond in Service...

Prayers of the People:

Our God, we give you thanks for those who have gone before us and from those whose questions, struggles to know, and wisdom we benefit.

Thank you for the Marys and Marthas of our life and our church.

- For the gifts of new possibilities that await ... just there ...in spite of our distraction
- For those who see things we cannot because of our fear, our experience, our knowing ...
- For those who wonder in ways that surprise us, invite us, and challenge

us to be part of their awe.

- For those who work so hard and continue to do so even when we take them for granted, when we betray them, when we neglect to treat them with justice or respect, when we assume and presume and then are shocked at their rebellion

Our God, we give you thanks that it is not all about us, that you continue to care and to love and to create possibilities of redemption and new life not only here among us but throughout your world.

Help us to see past ourselves enough to be able to sit in your presence, like Mary.

Help us to have the humility and the courage to wonder, if only for a moment, if you are about something entirely new.

Help us to carry that same spirit or curiosity and discovery beyond these walls into the world in which we serve and which you love.

So let us, in your name, dare to hope. Let us dare to hope for peace in the Ukraine. It is possible, right, Lord?

That no child will go to sleep hungry and none will find shelter under a piece of cardboard or a blown apart house.

That violence will be absent from families and they will still remember how to be kind.

That empathy, caring and love have a strength that we have completely underestimated and really do have the power to change the world.

Lord, be with us in our journey. Amen

Hymn - 649 - How clear is our vocation, Lord

Benediction:

May God give you full insight into his will for your lives, along with all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that your life may be worthy of the Lord and entirely pleasing to him.

And may you bear fruit in active goodness of every kind, continually growing in your knowledge and understanding of God.

And may God give you the strength you need to endure whatever comes with patience and fortitude, all the while giving thanks to God who has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to God's holy people.

Announcements for July 17th

1. **Strawberry Social and Bake Sale** at Victoria Presbyterian Church on July 20th, 7-9pm. It is self-serve or take-out. **\$10** That should be a yummy summer thing to do!
2. **Children's Choir!** Westminster is going to start a children's choir for the community. We are very excited about this adventure! We are looking for 7 year olds and up who love to sing. Start date is Thursday, September 15th at 6:30pm. Please contact me, Charlene Wilson, Peter Scoffield or Westminster Church if you know someone who would like to be part of this.
3. **A Celebration of Life** will be held for Betty Carscadden at Westminster Church on Saturday, July 30th at 10:30am. Reception to follow at the Delta at 11:30am and Committal at 1pm at Greenwood. All are welcome to attend.