

We all know this story about Mary and Martha... And probably because it is played out all the time and in all our families. I have vivid memories of complaining to my mom about doing the dishes at Thanksgiving when my sister was off playing with the cousins.

Growing up, it seemed like my older brother and I were the ones doing all the heavy lifting... Can you tell I have a little grudge about that? And after all these years? Truth is, I have to continue working on this... It's amazing how grudges can last years and years...

And perhaps I need to work on this, now more than ever. Because, you see, my sister is living near my mom and dad and she is helping them a lot-- giving them rides and making sure they're getting to family get-togethers... So, maybe she's getting a little bitter that my brothers and I are not doing enough. She says she's not, but I keep asking. I don't want her to be resentful about it.

Resentment is an awful thing, and it often leads to grudges. I heard a great definition of a grudge recently-- it's like taking poison and hoping the other person dies. You see grudges are those things that destroy relationships, they start out as small resentments and they grow and fester... And often involve those who are closest to us, often our families.

Grudges tie us up in knots. We can get emotionally invested or worked up a little bit. And when that happens, we might get a little adrenalin and we might like how that feels. Emotions are always tricky...

Have you ever noticed how some people start smiling when they're ranting and raving about a person they don't like? Yup, suffering is a tricky thing, sometimes we become in bondage to our suffering because we like how it feels. I know, it's a paradox... and it's also the truth...

That's the problem with grudges, they're hard to resolve because sometimes we like them a little bit too much... So, letting go of a grudge is particularly hard work.

If we're feeling a little worked up about someone, we should always pay attention to our physical reactions. Are we feeling a little adrenalin? Do we have a little extra energy? Are we indulging that feeling?

It takes a lot of self-reflection to notice if we like our suffering... And it's a good spiritual practice. Something to examine in our lives and something to always be reflecting and praying about...

This morning I'd also like to talk about reflection and action. It seems to me this is what is at play in our gospel reading. Martha is busy, she has a million things to do. We all know what that's like. In fact, we wear "busy" like it's a righteous thing to be. We value busy!

And, Mary on the other hand is listening to Jesus and integrating his words. Mary is reflecting, contemplating her life at the feet of Jesus.

And Jesus says that Mary has chosen the better part, I'm wondering what that better part is. What does that mean?

Martha is all action and Mary is all reflection. And it strikes me that they are not mutually exclusive things to do. I don't think this is an either/or dichotomy, but rather, both/and. You see, reflection is the foundation for action...

Reflection and action go hand in hand. We're not just busy for the sake of being busy, there are reasons we do what we do. We are all people of reflection and action; they are two sides of the same coin. All of us have some pattern or rhythm of getting things done on one hand and knowing why we do them on the other.

Mary and Martha are each actively engaging a different aspect of that process. And here's the primary distinction, it's not what Martha is doing that Jesus addresses, it's "how" she's doing it.

Martha is getting resentful and judgmental. She complains, "Tell her to help me! She not doing her share of the work. It's not fair!" She has a bad attitude... She is not loving, kind or gracious. You see, there's always a distinction between what we do and how we do it. This is an attitude... A way of being in the world...

Jesus doesn't negate the work Martha is doing, he's pointing out that reflection is also vitally important. Doing things is one thing, knowing why and how we do them is something else, and Jesus even goes so far as to say it is the better part.

In the things that we do, in our busyness, do we allow enough reflection in our lives so that the reasons we do what we do and how we do them are to be loving, kind and gracious?

This is all about connecting our lives with our values. Life is always about self-reflection, and reflecting at the feet of Jesus is where we, as Christians, get our foundation. And that foundation is summed up in loving God and loving our neighbor. This is grounding our busyness in the foundation of being loving, kind and gracious people.

Quick story... Having been involved with older adult ministry for many years this is something I've come to recognize and talk about frequently because it changes when we get older.

I have a friend, I'll call him Jim, who was incredibly active at church. He grew up in church. His spent his whole life going to church and sitting at the feet of Jesus; reflecting on his life in the light of Jesus...

Jim was always volunteering, amazingly handy, he could fix any electrical appliance ever made! He went to Holden village for years and years, helping whatever he could do. He was always at church plugging away at different projects. His foundation was in Jesus, that was how he loved his neighbor.

He lived a life a service, his life was deeply meaningful and rich with love...

But Jim was getting older. Even though he was thirty years older than me, we were good friends. We used to go out for pizza and beer once in a while. For the last couple years, it's been harder and harder for Jim to do the things he used to do. Getting harder to see, harder to hear, harder to remember... Very frustrating...

Before I left Austin, we went out one last time and we cried, not only because we were each losing a friend, but because Jim couldn't do all those things, he used to be able to do. He was despairing! He was at a time in his life when he was transitioning from being a human doing to becoming a human being.

And believe me, if we're lucky, we'll all eventually get to the same point. This is one of the challenges of getting older. In that action and reflection equation, it becomes all about reflection because frankly, we can't do things like we used to do... And so, the "how" we are in the world becomes all important.

The last time Jim and I got together, we talked a lot about that foundation in Jesus; being loving, kind and gracious people. Being loving, kind and gracious to our families, our neighbors... Because, eventually it's all that matters... We talked about it like being another one of his projects. Instead of working with his hands we talked about working with his words and attitudes.

And when we were done talking, it seemed so clear to both of us... isn't that what we're all supposed to do, and all the time? Abundant life is not always in the "what" we do, it is also in the "how" we do it...

The good news today is that Jesus invites us into a meaningful life. A life based on a foundation of love and in service for one another. This is a kind of eternal life. Not a quantity of life, but a quality of life. Being present with Jesus, being present with one another, being loving, kind, and gracious people. This leads to a life that is filling and meaningful.

A life that is purposeful and not resentful, a life that is deeply satisfied in all that is accomplished. A life well lived, deeply connected, consequential, and for the healing and wholeness of our world. Through us, God accomplishes much...

Reflection and action, let's always take the time to be loving kind and gracious, in our words and in our actions... It's who we are, it's our foundation, and exactly because we sit at the feet of Jesus. Every Sunday morning... Then we are sent out to "Go in peace and serve the Lord" *Thanks be to God?*

Amen...