

**Kirkin' o' the Tartans/July 21, 2019**  
**Amos 8:1-12; Psalm 52; Luke 10:38-42;**  
**Rev. Joel M. Krueger**

*"Of Two Minds"*

We hear in the gospel reading the a familiar story. Jesus and his band are traveling from village to village, teaching as they go and they come to the village of Mary and Martha and stop at their home. Martha, invites Jesus in, he enters the home and is welcomed in by the sisters.

We find that the sisters each have their own way of welcoming their guest, this teacher. Mary is the one who finds a place on the floor at Jesus' feet, curious and ready to absorb his every word. She is a student, she wishes to learn what the teacher has to offer, and in her own way, welcomes Jesus with her interest and rapt attention.

Martha on the other hand, knows the traditional ways of welcoming guests into your home. You greet them, welcome them in, give them the best seat in the house, clean things up so that they feel comfortable, bring refreshment for their dry throats, water to wash their feet and prepare a meal for them. This is how you welcome the stranger, the guest, into your home. And it is a lot of work.

Generally, this story has been seen as a dichotomy of two ways of being. One way is the way of Martha, the practical, action oriented, way of service, caring for physical and bodily needs. The other way, that expressed by Mary, is the contemplative, the intellectual, spiritual way of relating. And these two are seen as opposites, as juxtaposed against one another. The doer of deeds vs. the contemplative. The worker for justice or the monastic. The idea being that one is better than the other, namely the spiritual seeker, and Jesus seems to reaffirm that here.

However, seeing this story this way, leads us away from another truth. In this story, both women welcome Jesus, but in different ways. This is actually very similar to what happens in our house when Kate and I have company. If we are trying to prepare for guests at last minute, we both engage in the cleaning and preparation of the house, but once people begin to arrive, I am the one who generally may still get out the vacuum, move chairs in for people to sit, wash any dishes sitting on the counter, pick up the clutter, etc. Kate's role is to be the "Host", welcoming, greeting, offering drinks, and engaging in conversation, while I continue to clean up, or prepare other items for eating, etc. We each have our role and it works pretty well.

But in Luke's story, Martha is not content with her role, or more accurately, she is not content with her sister's role. She interrupts the conversation and instead of speaking to her sister directly, puts Jesus on the spot and asks him, "*Lord, do **you** not care that my sister has left **me** to do all the work by **myself**? Tell her to help me!*" His reply is telling. "*Martha, 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.*"

Jesus does not say to Martha that her way of showing hospitality is wrong, or less important than what Mary is doing. Rather, he expresses his concern for her, that she has become anxious and troubled, worried about all she is doing, and distracted. Distracted from what? Distracted from the original focus of her hospitality, namely Jesus himself. She has lost her focus, whereas Mary has maintained hers. Her devotion to, her connection with Christ.

It seems we live today in a world that has lost its focus. That we are a people of two minds. On so many levels, in so many different spheres, whether they be religious, political, environmental, ethical, whatever, it seems we find ourselves at odds with one another. At our last Social Justice Team meeting we discussed how so many of us are experiencing the inability to engage in conversation about very important issues with others around us, even close friends and family. How many of us have an agreement with those close to us, whether spoken or unspoken, that you will not talk about religion or politics?

What a shame this is! And what a terrible detriment to our social fabric, the loss of being able to engage in open discussion with others of a different mindset or perspective. There is no better recipe for disaster for any democratic nation or people, than to subvert the ability and freedom to engage in open discussion and the expression and reception of ideas.

As our sisters and brothers in the political realm of our country, and in places all around the world, become more and more polarized, become more and more divided, we are losing the ability to listen to one another, to compromise enough to find any common ground, to have understanding of other's views and other's experiences on issues relevant to all of us, and ultimately we are losing the ability to focus on what is essential and core to our unity.

It seems part of our human nature, that when we feel anxious, when we feel worried or threatened, we tend to pull into ourselves, or to group up with those of a like mind. Some find protection in lashing out at others, or in finding another to blame or scapegoat. We set up our camps, retreat to the protection of our fortresses, and begin to hurl the epithets and daggers of anger and abusive language at one another. We lose sight of who we are and thereby become something different than who we were.

We may feel a strong kinship to the psalmist in today's reading as he cries out against the evil in his time. Hear this version of Psalm 52 from the Message: *"Why do you brag of evil, "Big Man"? God's mercy carries the day. You scheme catastrophe; your tongue cuts razor-sharp, artisan in lies. You love evil more than good, you call black white. You love malicious gossip, you foul-mouth."* The psalmist speaks of those whose focus has turned to division rather than unity, who will do anything, including lying and deceit to protect themselves and those like them, creating an identity based on what they are not, rather than what they are for.

And we may resonate with the prophet Amos, who proclaimed the judgment of God on his own people who would not consider the consequences of their own evil upon themselves. *"Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?" skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. THE LORD HAS SWORN BY HIMSELF, THE PRIDE OF JACOB: "I WILL NEVER FORGET ANYTHING THEY HAVE DONE."(NIV)*

HOW CAN WE NOT THINK IN OUR OWN TIME OF THOSE WHO PROFIT IN THE MARKETS OF PHARMACEUTICALS AND THE HIGH COSTS OF HEALTH CARE, OF OUR CITIES WHERE THE HOMELESS CANNOT FIND AN AFFORDABLE PLACE TO LIVE, OF THE GAP BETWEEN THE RICH AND POOR GROWING EVER WIDER DAY BY DAY, OF THE VILIFICATION OF IMMIGRANTS AND PEOPLE OF DIFFERENCE, AND EVEN OF OUR OWN COMFORTS AND PLEASURES AFFORDED IN A SOCIETY THAT DOES NOT TAKE CARE OF ITS POOREST AND MOST VULNERABLE?

WE ARE CALLED TO HEAR AGAIN THE WISDOM OF THE ANCIENT CELTIC CHRISTIAN FAITH WHICH ABOVE ALL ELSE, REMINDS US OF THE BEGINNING OF THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES, IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS (1:26), THAT WE ARE MADE IN THE "IMAGE" AND "LIKENESS" OF OUR CREATOR. THE CELTS BELIEVED THAT WE MUST LOOK FOR THAT IMAGE AND LIKENESS IN ONE ANOTHER, FOR IT WAS THERE, IN THAT PLACE THAT WE WOULD FIND OUR DEEPEST CONNECTION, NOT ONLY TO ONE ANOTHER, BUT TO GOD AND TO THE WORLD, THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE AROUND US.

IN HIS BOOK CHRIST OF THE CELTS, AUTHOR J. PHILIP NEWELL SAYS OF BEING MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD, "*AND ABOVE ALL ELSE, IT IS TO SAY THAT LOVE AND THE DESIRE TO GIVE OURSELVES AWAY TO ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE, IS AT THE HEART OF WHO WE ARE, DEEPER THAN ANY FEAR OR HATRED THAT HOLD US HOSTAGE. DEEP WITHIN US IS A LONGING FOR UNION, FOR OUR GENESIS IS IN THE ONE FROM WHOM ALL THINGS HAVE COME.*" (P.4) IT IS THAT LONGING FOR UNION AND EXPRESSING THAT, WHICH MARY SHOWS IN HER WELCOMING OF JESUS.

NEWELL WRITES ABOUT JOHN SCOTUS ERIUGENA, THE 9TH CENTURY CELTIC THEOLOGIAN, ALSO KNOWN AS *JOHN OF IRELAND*. NEWELL WRITES, "*MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, HOWEVER, HE (ERIUGENA) IS INVITING US TO BE AWARE OF OUR OWN CAPACITY FOR FALSENESS AND THE POTENTIAL FOR DISTORTION IN EVERYTHING THAT HAS BEEN CREATED. BUT MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL, HE IS RECALLING US TO OUR DEEPEST IDENTITY AS BORN OF LIGHT.*" (P.13-14) MARTHA'S ORIGINAL INTENT IS ALSO TO WELCOME JESUS, BUT SHE GETS CAUGHT UP IN ALL SHE IS DOING, LOSING SIGHT OF HER ORIGINAL FOCUS, BECOMING SELF-ABSORBED AND WORRIED MORE ABOUT HERSELF, CONTRASTING HERSELF WITH HER SISTER, RATHER THAN REMEMBERING THE ORIGINAL INTENT OF WHAT SHE WAS DOING, NAMELY WELCOMING THEIR GUEST. IT IS A DANGER WE ARE ALL PRONE TO. LOSING SIGHT OF WHO WE ARE, WHO WE ARE MEANT TO BE, AS CREATURES CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.

WE LIVE IN A TIME OF GREAT DIVISION, OF UNCERTAINTY AND DEEP ANXIETIES AMONG OUR OWN PEOPLE. A TIME OF MISTRUST AND POLARIZING POLITICS, OF DOWNRIGHT FEAR AND CONCERN FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR NATION AND OUR WORLD.

YET, WE ARE CALLED TO REGAIN OUR FOCUS, TO STRIVE FOR A DEEPER VISION, A VISION KNOWN BY THE ANCIENT CELTS OF LONG AGO, A VISION OF A WORLD CREATED IN ONENESS, WHERE THE GIFTS OF EACH AND THE DIVERSITY OF OUR WHOLE IS UNDERSTOOD AND APPRECIATED BY ALL, WHERE UNITY AMONG PEOPLES, A RE-COMMUNING WITH THE NATURAL WORLD, AND THE WORKING FOR PEACE WITH JUSTICE FOR ALL, IS A DIVINE CALLING.

MAY WE OVERCOME THE POWERS OF DIVISION AND HATRED THAT EXIST IN OUR HEARTS AND IN OUR LANDS AND MAY OURS BE A CELEBRATION OF THE GREATNESS OF DIVERSITY, OF THE ENGAGEMENT OF DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES, AND OF THE POWER OF LOVE, IN WHOM WE ARE ALL CREATED. AMEN.

I HAVE BEEN WATCHING THE PBS SERIES "THE CIVIL WAR", PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY KEN BURNS. I WAS AMAZED, AS I ALWAYS AM, FIRST AT THE BRUTALITY OF THAT WAR, BUT ALSO OF ITS POLITICS. HOW UNCIVIL SO MUCH OF THE RHETORIC AND THE NAME CALLING AND SUCH. I WAS ASTONISHED THAT LINCOLN'S OWN GENERAL, GEORGE B. MCCLELLAN, DISRESPECTFULLY REFERRED TO PRESIDENT LINCOLN, HIS OWN COMMANDER IN CHIEF, AS "*THAT ORIGINAL GORILLA*" AND FOUND IT HARD TO IMAGINE, IN ALL THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES, WHAT LINCOLN HAD TO PUT UP WITH AND CONTEND WITH IN THOSE DAYS.

BUT WHAT REALLY CAUGHT MY ATTENTION WAS THE CABINET HE CHOSE TO SURROUND HIMSELF WITH. INSTEAD OF BRINGING IN THOSE OF LIKE MIND TO HIS, HE CHOSE MANY WHO HAD BEEN HIS ADVERSARIES. THEY REPRESENTED EVERY FACTION OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY. AS DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN SAYS IN HER BOOK, LEADERSHIP IN TURBULENT TIMES, "*LINCOLN CREATED A TEAM OF INDEPENDENT, STRONG-MINDED MEN, ALL OF WHOM WERE MORE EXPERIENCED IN PUBLIC LIFE, BETTER EDUCATED, AND MORE CELEBRATED THAN HE. IN THE TOP THREE POSITIONS, AT THE STATE DEPARTMENT, THE TREASURY, AND THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT, HE PLACED HIS THREE CHIEF RIVALS - WILLIAM SEWARD, SALMON CHASE, AND EDWARD BATES - EACH OF WHOM THOUGHT HE SHOULD BE PRESIDENT INSTEAD OF THE PRAIRIE LAWYER FROM ILLINOIS.*" LINCOLN WANTED THE MOST CAPABLE MEN IN THE COUNTRY AT HIS SIDE, AND HE TRUSTED IN HIS OWN LEADERSHIP TO BE ABLE TO BRING THEM TOGETHER, KNOWING THEIR LOYALTY TO THE UNION WAS UNQUESTIONABLE.

THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR TORE THIS COUNTRY APART, AND WHETHER OR NOT IT HAS OR WILL EVER FULLY RECOVER, HAS YET TO BE SEEN. BUT LINCOLN AND HIS CABINET, THOUGH DIVERSE IN SO MANY WAYS, WERE ABLE, IN THE END, THROUGH SO MANY FAILURES, WRONG DECISIONS, MISFORTUNE AND CATASTROPHE, WERE ABLE TO BRING THIS NATION BACK TOGETHER. AND WHEN LINCOLN'S EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION BECAME LAW ON JANUARY 1, 1863, FREEING 3.5 MILLION AFRICAN AMERICANS FROM SLAVERY, IT WAS SAID THAT THE WAR TOOK ON A NEW DIRECTION, A NEW SPIRIT ENGULFED THE LAND. LINCOLN SAID OF THIS, "*I NEVER, IN MY LIFE, FELT MORE CERTAIN THAT I WAS DOING RIGHT, THAN I DO IN THIS ACT, AND MY WHOLE SOUL IS IN IT.*"