

## **Love. Listen. And live a new life.**

*A sermon preached at the Christ Church Roundup Sunday Service and Picnic by the Rev. Bruce McNab.  
8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. Proper 11, Year C. (Text: Luke 10:38-42)*

It's great to be back here at Coldstream Trout Lodge for a seventh Roundup Sunday Service and Barbeque. Many thanks to Bob and Cynthia Chapman for inviting us here and feeding us and providing entertainment for our children. I think a little round of applause is in order.

It is important for us to recognize that we are here as invited guests. If you take this morning's gospel as a paradigm for what we're experiencing, we might say that Bob and Cynthia are treating *us* the way Mary and Martha treated *Jesus*. That is to say: We're their *guests*. We're getting special treatment. Special attention. And they're both sitting right here with us, not fussing around with the food or other things.

In the little story of Martha's dinner party for Jesus, the punch line packs a lot of punch. Jesus says: *"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."*

We live in the age of distractions. Our culture is organized around distractions. It specializes in distractions! We Americans are the busiest people on earth. And I am not just talking about corporate executives or harassed soccer moms with four kids. It extends to everybody. We're all "double-tasking," or "triple-tasking." If we're not *busy*, we feel guilty. We feel as if there's something wrong.

I think we've become addicted to distractions! Seriously. Our attention span is getting shorter and shorter every year. The electronic media and the gadgets that dominate our "wired" world seem to have changed the circuits in our brains and installed a feature – like a smart-phone "app" – that tells us we need to be hearing or seeing something new at least once every two minutes, regardless of where we are or what we're doing.

It happens to me a lot, and I am basically a pretty mellow, mostly focused person. (Or at least I like to think I am.) I don't even have a "smart phone." I just have this old dumb phone that I can talk over. On Saturday, which is my sermon day, I sit down to write a sermon, and I'm clicking along with the sermon, listening to the Lord, putting some words together, thinking about all of you — when suddenly a little box pops up on the computer screen that says I have a new email.

And when that happens I can't NOT click over to see what it is! I *have* to read it. After all, it might be urgent. (Ha-hah!) And if it happens to be a personal email from somebody I know rather than an advertisement for new hiking boots from L.L.Bean, then I feel compelled to respond. Immediately! (I imagine that the person who emailed me is sitting there, drumming his fingers on the desk, waiting for my answer to come through.)

Then, my response to that email reminds me of something, or it triggers a thought of someone else I should contact, and before I know it fifteen minutes or even a half an hour has gone by, and I've lost the thread of where I was in my unfinished sermon. —That's why it takes me all of Saturday to write one!

Here's something else. I bet you've all had *this* experience: You go to see somebody, either on business or just to be social, and the person you're visiting can't put down his BlackBerry – or iPhone, or whatever. All the while he's supposed to be talking to you, sitting there in the flesh in the room with him, this very important "wired" person is busy checking his email, sending text messages, and generally distracted from

whatever conversation you're trying to have. He looks up every now and then when HE has something to say, but when YOU start talking his eyes drift back down to his gadget. (And it's even more annoying if this person is your own grown-up son or daughter, not just a teenager with bad manners. We want to say, "Put the dang phone down and talk to your daddy!")

Martha of Bethany loved Jesus, and she wanted to put on a wing-ding of a party for him, so she spent all her time fussing with the hors d'oeuvres and checking the roast, and no time with her honored guest. Martha meant well, but she had her priorities wrong. When her sister Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and just listened to what he was saying, Martha felt put out. She was mad. And she was maybe a little jealous too: because *she* would really like to have sat and listened to Jesus, but *she* "had to do everything." Or so she thought. She said to herself, "*Mary isn't working as hard as I am to make this a special evening for Jesus. How can she just sit there with the guest of honor and do nothing while there's still work left to do in the kitchen?*"

You know what Jesus really said back to her was this: "*Martha, Martha. You're so distracted by all your party preparations. But you know, one dish would have been enough.*" —Mmmm. Tough for the hostess to hear.

We're too busy. We're too distracted. And we easily get the focus of our lives wrong: distractions, worries, messes, things to clean up, lists to check, business to do, people to see, places to go.

We focus on our to-do list – all items of which seem to us equally worthwhile and important – and as we live like that, we're less focused on God. Less focused on Jesus, who promises "*I am with you always.*" He *is* with us. He is *speaking* to us. But we're not able to listen for more than a minute.

Remember my example in the children's sermon? We're like people with a camera who don't seem to be able to focus on our subject. We want to take a nice picture of our child or our wife or our husband, or our friend . . . but then we *also* want to include the pretty flowers, and the mountains in the background, and the interesting architecture of the lodge, and maybe the sunset, too —all in one shot. So when we finally look at the picture we took, our beloved – who was supposed to be the focus of the photograph – is just a little *dot* in the middle of a vast, busy, distracting landscape.

Jesus calls us to stop. Stop what we're doing and listen. As the Master said to Martha, "*There is need of only one thing.*" One dish is enough. Life is really *not* about the menu... Or the table arrangements... It's about being together.

The first great commandment is "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind, and all your strength.*" The second is like it, "*Love you neighbor as yourself.*"

Love is listening! So, stop and listen. Listen to the Lord, and listen to your neighbor. Listen to the Lord, who might be speaking to you *through* your neighbor. Turn off your smart phone, and *focus*.

Love. Listen. And live a new life!

For us, Jesus is the honored guest at every party – whether it's this Roundup Sunday Picnic or some other gathering – because *we're the believers*, we're the people who can see that Jesus is *alive*, risen and walking among us, everywhere we go. Amen.