



or watch Dynasty.  
There was a sense that no one  
was meant to see the work  
that went on behind the swinging door  
—you weren't meant  
to see the work in the kitchen  
—the electric stove  
with all its coils heated red hot  
or the sink piled high  
with dirty dishes.  
It was as if we were to think  
those pimento cheese sandwiches,  
those pigs in a blanket,  
those Jell-O salads  
had made themselves.

Kitchen work and the mess it  
created  
stayed behind the swinging door.  
Nowadays, we have kitchens  
with wide islands for everyone to sit at;  
kitchens that spill out into dining rooms,  
family rooms and dens;  
kitchens that invite our guests  
to be present while the meals  
or appetizers are prepared.

Because no one wants to be stuck in the kitchen  
stuffing pastry shells  
when Uncle George tells that story  
from 20 years ago  
of how he and your dad  
took all the kids  
out on the boat

and it ran out of gas.  
No one revels being sequestered  
behind the closed swinging door  
shucking corn  
while everyone else  
gathers out on the deck to have drinks.  
No one wants to make the meal  
while the rest of the family  
laughs in the next room.<sup>1</sup>

Those old kitchens come to mind  
when I read this story  
about Mary and Martha.  
Can't you just see Martha  
busy back in the kitchen,  
pushing that wooden swinging door  
with a little too much force  
so that it almost pops her back in the face?  
Can't you sense the tension building  
as Martha carefully cuts the crust  
off the chicken salad sandwiches  
and hears Jesus, the disciples and Mary  
laughing as James and John  
tell the story (again)  
of how Peter didn't have enough faith to walk on  
water  
and started to sink?

Chuckles and muffled conversation  
can be heard through the swinging door  
as everyone else has a good time

---

<sup>1</sup> Based off of the opening paragraph from Brian Peterson, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-16-3/commentary-on-luke-1038-42-4>

while Martha is busy,  
doing what the host does  
for the party.

She has called for Mary a few times  
and Mary quickly grabs the hors d'oeuvres platter  
from her demanding sister  
and then goes back to sit with Jesus and the  
men!

Martha is all but fed up,  
not because she is the hostess,  
not because she is doing the work  
of meal prep and setting the table.  
She was happy to be hosting Jesus,  
her teacher and friend,  
she was happy to open her home  
and be the hostess for Jesus and his disciples.

Martha is frustrated  
because what she sees  
is that she is carrying  
the burden of hospitality *alone*;  
she's overwhelmed and tired  
of being the only one working.

And while she's working  
she can't quit stewing on the fact  
that her sister is not working,  
her sister is sitting, resting,  
Mary is not **doing** anything.

"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work  
by myself? Tell her then to help me."

Do you not care?

But Jesus does care. He cares a lot.

The expectations of the time  
would have been such that women  
did not sit at a teachers' feet  
—learning, following, being allowed  
to take part in the training  
of being a disciple.

Women were the ones responsible for the hosting,  
for the preparing the cleaning up of the meal  
—whether this was fair or not isn't the issue—  
that was just custom at the time.

In defense of Martha,  
on the surface

I can understand why she is upset.  
I bet if you asked any woman here today:  
any mom, any wife,  
any daughter, any sister  
if they can see themselves in Martha—  
the answer is a resounding,  
yes!

Martha had every right to get frustrated,  
to want to know why,  
in a moment's notice,  
social convention was left behind  
and re-written so that  
Mary didn't have to do anything!

But haven't we learned yet,  
that things like social convention  
weren't really on Jesus' agenda?  
Haven't we learned  
to expect the unexpected

with this savior of the world?  
Haven't we learned to expect him  
to turn things upside down  
in order to be right-side-up?

Even so, I bristle  
when it sounds like Jesus  
is scolding Martha  
for doing the work of hospitality.  
Someone had to make sure  
there was bread to eat and wine to  
drink  
when Jesus and his 12 bros  
showed up at Martha's  
house.

Hospitality is a major aspect  
of Mediterranean culture and daily life.  
So, there must be a good reason  
why Jesus reacts  
this way toward Martha.

Hospitality has been an undercurrent theme  
in Luke's gospel as Jesus  
makes his way to Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>  
Remember how James and  
John  
wanted to call down fire from  
heaven  
to destroy a village  
that didn't offer Jesus hospitality  
because his face was set toward Jerusalem?

---

<sup>2</sup> Mikeal C. Parsons, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-16-3/commentary-on-luke-1038-42-2>

A story of how  
not everyone is prepared  
to offer Jesus hospitality.

Then Luke tells a strange and unexpected story  
about the hospitality  
of a filthy, rotten, no-good Samaritan.

A story that connected this radical hospitality  
to God's radical grace and mercy.

So, Luke has covered  
the larger meta narrative  
of the hospitality of God  
to foreigners  
to neighbors,  
so that now we come a story of hospitality  
to the particular.

Hospitality of us.

The workers.

The doers.

A story where doing the work of hospitality  
is married to the study of the word,  
the following of Jesus,  
the learning of the way.

It seems like Luke,  
writing for the early church  
might have been on to something more  
than a sisterly spat  
or rules about Middle Eastern hospitality.

Luke might have made this story  
a metaphor or a teaching reminder

for those early Christians  
who did so much,  
of the work Jesus has called us to participate in,  
that this story served as a reminder  
that serving is not the only avenue  
for God's gracious mercy.

Today Martha might say,  
Lord, don't you care?  
Don't you care that we've worked really hard  
to make sure that church looks good  
and the grounds are taken care of?  
Lord, don't you care  
that we give a portion of our budget  
to community mission and non-profit?  
Lord don't' you care  
that we have a free meal  
for anyone in the community that might need it?  
Lord, don't you care  
that we knit prayer shawls?  
Lord, don't you care  
that we visit the sick and home-bound?  
Don't you care  
that we do all this work?

Now, don't hear me saying  
that those things aren't important.  
They are.

The work Martha does,  
and the word Jesus uses  
is diakonia, the Greek word for serving  
—a serving particularly that involves work;  
work with the poor,  
the forgotten, the oppressed.

It is where we get our word for, deacon.  
It is good work,  
it is important work.

Does the Lord care that we give  
a good percentage of our money away?  
Absolutely.

Does the Lord care  
that we are good stewards  
of our grounds and facilities?

Absolutely.

Does the Lord care  
about Sabbath Soup  
and Prayer Shawls,  
Congregational Care  
and the Good Samaritan fund?

Absolutely.

But in doing that work,  
doing acts of service,  
doing,  
doing,  
doing

...can you see where this might be going?  
Can you see where or what  
Jesus might be saying to Martha,  
to us?

Martha, what you do is so important,  
but a life of service  
and only acts of service  
isn't sustainable.

You'll burn out;  
you'll run out of gas;

you'll snap and lash out in anger  
when you've overworked yourself.

Diakonia, work, can't be  
the only way you live out your life of faith.  
Our brother James is right,  
faith without works is dead.  
But the converse is also true,  
works without faith  
will run you ragged.  
You need more than just work  
to sustain your life in the kingdom,  
and my word gives you that.

Mary and Martha,  
two sisters,  
represent two kinds of important  
and essential partner ministries:  
diakonia and the word.

“Martha represents the ministry of diakonia,  
and Mary represents the ministry of the word.  
Jesus does not prefer  
the ministry of the [word] over diakonia.  
Instead, Jesus does not want the diakonia  
to be at the expense  
of the ministry of the word.

Both ministries are important.  
The ministry of diakonia  
should not absorb our energy and time  
and drive us to neglect God's word.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Niveen Sarras, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-16-3/commentary-on-luke-1038-42-5>

Which means what appears  
as a rebuke  
can be read as an invitation.<sup>4</sup>

An invitation to come and learn  
—to sit at the feet of Jesus,  
and take in what it means  
to follow his path.

Jesus says that Mary has chosen the better path,  
but maybe *what he says*  
is just as important  
*as how he says it.*<sup>5</sup>

Imagine Martha, standing in her apron,  
flour in her hair,  
one hand on her hip  
and the other on the swinging door.  
Maybe when Jesus spoke  
his tone was more,  
'Martha, I was hoping you'd come  
and sit with us too.  
I think this would be good for you  
—you have such a heart for learning—  
I have wanted you to be in here with us  
because I know how hard you have worked  
to make us feel welcome  
—now let me welcome you.'

Work of service  
that isn't at the expense  
of the work of study.

A story for the early church

---

<sup>4</sup> Elisabeth Johnson, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-16-3/commentary-on-luke-1038-42-3>

<sup>5</sup> Kip O'Connell Dooley, <https://inwardoutward.org/tonematters/>

and the 21<sup>st</sup> century church.

I don't know

what kind of kitchen you have  
in your house.

But perhaps this story of two sisters,  
this story of two ministries,  
can remind us  
that in the hospitality of God,  
we find a Lord who is gracious and kind,  
who does in fact care about our work  
but also cares about our study.

In hospitality of God,

we find a savior who

will push open the swinging kitchen door  
and help you with the dishes  
and beckon you to the fireplace.