

**The Church of the Holy Trinity, Rittenhouse Square
July 22, 2007 (8th Sunday after Pentecost)
By the Reverend Meg Buerkel
“Waiting...”**

I am NOT good at waiting... if I walk into a restaurant and there is a wait, usually, I turn around and walk back out. I have been known to return clothing to the racks at Macy's because the line for the fitting rooms was too long, and I have actually skipped rides at Disney World because I could see how many times the lines snaked around behind the hedges. I don't like to wait.

So it was no surprise to me on Friday night, or, rather, Saturday morning, that I was not about to wait for my Harry Potter book... I got to the Barnes and Noble at 11:30, and received a bracelet for the 450th book to be sold after midnight. It was fun to watch all the people – with painted on scars and round glasses and striped scarves and to feel the excitement in the air, especially at 12:01, but there was no way I was going to wait around that long to get the 450th book. I wouldn't even get to begin reading it until after today's sermon is finished, anyways...

Like most of us, I want what I want right now. Our whole society is sort of in a hurry – we have fast food and FedEx, and we even get frustrated with dial up internet now that we know cable internet. Waiting is an inconvenience – there are always better things we could be doing.

This week, someone asked me how I go about writing sermons. And I told him my 'method' – I read the lessons, study, pray, and wait. It's a combination of Martha and Mary – actively studying and doing and thinking along with a contemplative practice of waiting for a direction to follow.

This waiting can be the source of a lot of stress some weeks. Waiting for the sermon is the work of listening for and to the Holy Spirit. And I must confess, there are plenty of times when I get impatient with God – hurry up, give me something to say!

My spiritual life is much more Martha-like than Mary-like. It doesn't take me long to engage God in a conversation like Martha's

recrimination of Mary – hurry up, tell her to help me out here in the kitchen. Hurry up, give me a theme!

And just as Jesus helps Martha see that she is wrong, I get that reminder as well. Like Jesus' words to Martha, it's not a harsh reprimand, but rather a voice of compassion saying something like, 'It's not YOUR time, it's my time – sit with me for awhile – listen – stop going and doing and thinking and reading and studying – just wait.'

When I listen to this story of Martha and Mary, I tend to take on the more spiritualized reading – that of active vs. contemplative prayer styles. Martha wholeheartedly welcomes and prepares and serves, while Mary quietly sits and waits and listens. When read in isolation, this story does seem to be about the different manners of being with God.

We are, however, obliged to look at the story that surrounds this story – to seek the reasons Luke includes this minor squabble between Martha and Mary here, at this point in his gospel.

The story of Martha and Mary immediately follows the story we heard last week – the story of the rich young man who asks he must do to inherit eternal life... remember the answer? Love God and love your neighbor. He then asks, "who is my neighbor?" and Jesus tells the story of the good Samaritan. This tale would have been shocking to the ears of the crowd: Samaritans were bad people – if Jesus told the story today, he would replace the Samaritan with a crack-addicted gang member or a soldier from the Taliban army – someone we would not expect to stop and help out. Jesus' message was that we are all part of the community of God and neighbors one to another – even Samaritans and our enemies, are part of God's kingdom.

Likewise, during Jesus Christ's time, it was not 'appropriate' to educate women – they would never have been allowed to sit at the feet of a rabbi, or teacher, or instructor. They would have been expected to stay away – hidden – such things were not the place for women. Yet, here, Jesus Christ accepts, allows, and encourages Mary to sit at his feet and to listen. To learn. To follow.

The story immediately following this episode is the one in which the disciples ask Jesus how to pray – and he responds with the Lord's

Prayer. "OUR Father... (not MY Father)... your kingdom come... your will be done..."

Luke ties these stories together as illustrations for his reader about the radical love and concern God holds for all people. All people have access to the kingdom of God. All people have access to the reconciling love of God.

When we look at the gospel with reference to the passage from Amos in today's first lesson, we are reminded that God's radical love and concern for all people extends to the practice of justice and fairness in our relationships one with another. We are not to allow greed to devalue coins and inflate weights; we are not to enslave others through substandard wages; and, we are not to cheat others for our own benefit. We are to remember that all people are God's people – as Paul writes to the Colossians, "all ... have been created through [Christ] and for [Christ]."

Today's passages call us to examine not only our own prayer life – and how active or contemplative we may be, they also call us to examine our actions towards others. Today's passages call us to act with love and compassion and justice towards all people, especially those who are not at the table with us; whether they suffer from AIDS in Kenya or labor in migrant communities here; whether they are old or young, black or white, gay or straight; whether they toil in sweatshops or endure mental illness. It's a tall order, but acting with love and compassion and justice is how we proclaim the Gospel of what God has done and is doing in Christ.

And, this Gospel news is something we just cannot wait to happen on its own – the more we wait, the more injustice and suffering flourishes: we are called to action as Christians, to proclaim the love of God to ALL people, here and now.

God help us. Amen.

© Church of the Holy Trinity Rittenhouse Square. All rights reserved.