

CONNECTED AND DISCONNECTED

COLOSSIANS 1: 15-28

LUKE 10: 38-42

A young American got a clerical job at the White House, and after a Staff reception hosted by the President, thought that his mother would be thrilled to get a phone call from the White House. So he rang her.

“Mother”, he said proudly. “This is a big day for me. You know what? I’m calling you from the White House!”

His mother seemed unimpressed, and said, “Well, son, I’ve had a big day too. You know what? I’ve finally managed to clear out the attic!”

Deflated, the young American was unimpressed by news of his mother’s achievement.

Here we have two relatives who each thought that what they were doing was important, and expected the other to agree. Except they didn’t agree, and each had a different idea about what’s important and what really matters.

We could think the same about the difference between Martha and Mary, when Jesus came to teach at their house. Martha’s priority, as someone who gets things done, was to provide hospitality to her guests. Mary’s priority was simply to listen to Jesus and learn from Jesus, to connect with Jesus. In summary, Martha was into “doing”, and Mary was into “being”.

We could just leave it there, except that Martha criticized Mary for not “doing”, and Jesus praised Mary for just “being.”

This is really all about spiritual awareness! Martha was spiritually asleep, and Mary was spiritually awake. The Greek verb describing Martha is PERIESPATO, which means drawn away from what matters, disconnected, distracted. Martha was disconnected and distracted from Jesus because of busyness!

Martha is not alone in her spiritual isolation because of busyness. I am certainly too busy! You are probably too busy as well. We make our busyness our excuse for not attending to God. And what does it produce? In

Martha's case, it produced anxiety. Busyness and anxiety go together, and cause a kind of blindness, so that we "see" things and "see" people, not as they are, but as we are!

How we feel is how we see the World. So negative feelings stop us seeing the World as it really is!

St. Paul thought a lot about human actions. He concluded that it's not our actions that count, it's our motives that matter much more, and of motives, the highest motive is the motive of love. In other words, if we get our Being right, then our Doing will flow naturally from our Being, and our Doing will be right. Actions on their own are not enough! Many human actions stem from negative feelings! As the mystic Meister Eckhart said,

"It is not by your actions that you will be saved and awakened, but by your being. It is not by what you do, but by what you are, that you will be judged. What good is it to you to feed the hungry, give the thirsty to drink, or visit prisoners in jail?"

In her busyness and anxiety, Martha disconnected herself from Jesus. She is an example to avoid!

In contrast to Martha, Mary connected with Jesus and placed Being above Doing. Mary got her spiritual priorities in the right order. She resisted being moved away from Jesus by the demands of conventional hospitality.

The ideas of "connection", and "being moved away" from what really matters, are key ideas in our Reading from Colossians. Paul describes the Christian life as consisting of ME METAKINOUMENOI, not being moved away, from faith in the Gospel and from trust that Christ is within. Paul knew that the ordinary things of life, the cares and anxieties, and the competing demands on every side, all conspire to move Christians away from God's plan and purposes for their lives.

I've said that Martha was disconnected from Jesus, and that Mary was connected with Jesus. The idea in Colossians is that Jesus himself is the Connector of everyone and everything. Paul develops the idea of Jesus the Connector in several stages.

First, Paul says that Jesus is the Logos of God and the Eikon of God. As Logos, Jesus is the Word of God, and is therefore the means by which people hear the voice of God. As Logos too, Jesus is God in action, and is

therefore the means by which people are aware of God's activity in the world. As Eikon, Jesus is the Image of God, and is therefore the means by which people see the face of God. In other words if you want to hear God, listen to Jesus. If you want to know what God has done and is doing, attend to Jesus. If you want to see God, look at Jesus. In other words, Jesus Christ and God are intimately connected.

Second, Paul says that Jesus is intimately connected with the world, as its co-creator with God. By the world, Paul means everything that exists, both physical things and spiritual beings. Paul was careful to connect Jesus with everything in Creation, because he rejected the teachings of the Gnostic Christian movement. The Gnostics believed that only the "spiritual" level of existence matters, and that progress in the "spiritual" life means rejecting "matter" and all that belongs to the "physical" level of existence. Paul says no! Jesus connects everyone and everything.

Third, Paul says that Jesus connects God with those who have been alienated from God, and does so by breaking down the barriers between them and God. In other words, Jesus is the great Reconciler. Jesus reconciles by his one great sacrifice on the Cross for each and every person. Jesus reconciles by interceding for sinners before God in Heaven.

Fourth, Paul says that Jesus connects the whole Church together as one Body, and is the head of the Body.

So, in four important and fundamental ways, Jesus Christ is the great Connector. In response to Jesus, some people like Mary place Being above Doing, and connect with Him. Others, like Martha fail to connect because of busyness and anxiety and spiritual blindness. I conclude with these words of advice from Archbishop Michael Ramsey:

"We are here not only to do things. We are here to be something, to become something, and that is the meaning of our being called to be Saints. Christianity is about us doing things here AND about us being something whose goal is beyond here."

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