

“Do Be Do Be Do”

Luke 10:38-42

I love this little story of Martha and Mary. In the reading, Jesus sides with Mary. Martha thinks Mary *should* be helping instead of sitting and listening when there is so much to do. Instead of agreeing with her and sending Mary off to the kitchen to do dishes, Jesus tells Martha that is she who is distracted by many things and that Mary has chosen what is best.

Even though Jesus chastises Martha and tells her that Mary is doing the right thing, I don't think that Jesus was suggesting that the dishes should never be done. What he was saying was there is a time to do dishes but this was not the time. While he was there in her living room talking about the kingdom of God, where Martha needed to be was beside her sister at his feet listening, learning and connecting to the life that he was offering. There is a time for work and a time for prayer. There is a time for contemplation and reflection and a time for work and action.

Sadly, sometimes people and churches do neither. They don't do much in the way of genuine waiting and praying for the direction of the Lord, and neither do they go out and feed the hungry and seek out the lost and the lonely. They neither have the relationship with God nor any real purpose. I think that is tragic. That, friends, is a wasted life and a sad place to be. We were created for relationship with God and we are alive and full when we find that relationship. But as we find our being in that relationship, God moves us and fills us with a calling. You see, we were also created to *do something* that furthers the kingdom of God. Sometimes people have a sense of what they were created for—they find that sweet spot where what they love doing intersects with a need in the world. That place is where God is calling you to be.

The truth is, even though like Martha and Mary we tend to lean one way or the other, we need the balance. We need to do both. If you are a bit like Martha and are constantly checking off things on your “to do list” and you don't spend any time finding out what's on God's to do list for you, then you are in danger of burning out. Isaiah 40:31 “But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” Notice whose strength is renewed? “Those who wait for the Lord”. And notice what they do when their strength is renewed? They shall lie on the couch and not be weary, they shall relax and not feel faint... no! It doesn't even say that they shall renew their strength so they can wait some more on the Lord. They shall “mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

In my daily Bible reading lately I've been using the *Word for you Today*. Copies are available at the back of the church. I read the scriptures that they suggest at the bottom of each devotional. Anyway the readings lately have been the stories of King David in 1st and 2nd Samuel. There is no question that David is an action man. Even when he was young and the Philistines are tormenting the Israelites and Goliath in particular is saying “Come on, which one of you puny chickens is gonna fight me?” While all the soldiers and all the kings' men sit around and nervously bite their nails, David stands up and says “I will”. He doesn't want armour or a sword. He knows that God is with him and indeed he takes down the giant with one smooth stone from his sling shot. But I notice that anytime David does something of consequence he first “inquires of the Lord” what he should do. (2 Samuel 2:1 for example). David always goes to God for the ‘to do list’ and if what he's thinking of doing isn't on God's to do list he doesn't do it. Of course he does mess up on

occasion, but then he always comes back and recognizes that he's messed up and seeks forgiveness. Action-oriented people like David, like the disciple Peter, do get themselves into trouble, but for every time they mess up there are many more things that they do that make a huge difference to the kingdom of God.

On the other hand, prayer can sometimes be a distraction. It's a bit of a running joke among Christians that when you really don't want to do something that someone asks you to do, you say "Well, let me pray about that and I'll get back to you"—which can be another way of saying: "I'll think about it. I've thought about it. No." Sitting at the Lord's feet can sometimes feel safer than going out and doing something. Stepping out of your shell can be hard. But there are times when we need more than prayer. It's like a song written for the 1985 Ethiopian famine called: "Tears are not enough". James (2:14-17) says: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

I believe that if we indeed take the time to sit at the Lord's feet and pray and then go out and act on what you heard at the feet of the Lord, you don't need to be afraid. What God truly calls you to do God will bless and God will lead the way. Of course that doesn't make the journey easy but sitting at the Lord's feet first gives us the courage and the endurance to finish the race.

Next Saturday there will be an opportunity to sit at the Lord's feet and to try to discern to what action God is calling us as a church with regard to being an inclusive church to people who are gay and lesbian. It is hard to believe that it was more than twenty years ago that the United Church of Canada voted to affirm that homosexual people could be admitted into full membership in the United Church of Canada (1988). The issue at the time centered around the ordination of homosexual people because any full member is eligible to be considered for ordination.

In some ways a lot has changed in twenty years and in other ways, very little has changed. Society has become more tolerant certainly than the past but there is clearly still a long way to go. You've perhaps heard about Tyler Clementi.



Tyler was a first year university student at Rutgers in New Jersey. He was a quiet kid except when he played the violin. He played extremely well and beautifully. Clementi was not a music major, but played so well he made the Rutgers Symphony Orchestra, which is comprised mostly of graduate music students and undergraduate majors. When he played the violin people said he came out of his shell and shone. On September 22nd this shy and talented young man ended his life by jumping off the George Washington Bridge. Why? Well it seems his roommate secretly live streamed (video taped and broadcast on the web) a romantic encounter that Tyler had with another man. One simple kiss. Tyler was very much in the closet about his sexual orientation. Maybe in his first year of university he was just coming to terms with a difference he likely had been aware of for much of his life. We don't know. We just know that two days after that video went on the web, Tyler wrote a terse message on his Facebook status: "Jumping off the gw bridge. Sorry." What a senseless and tragic end to a beautiful life. Tyler is far from the only one. 90% of homosexual teens report being bullied and harassed.

I can't think of another group of people who more desperately need the church. Why do I say that? Because not only have they been and felt ostracized by society, but they have been cut off from a real relationship with God because most gay people have heard over and over again that their orientation is a sin; that it's an abomination as it is written in Leviticus 18:22, and that they are going to hell. Somehow people forget to mention that according to Leviticus it is also an abomination to eat lobster (Lev:11:10-11) or for me to wear pants (Deut 22:5). That it is forbidden to wear a shirt that has a poly-cotton blend (actually a wool-linen, Lev 19:19). But it is OK to sell your daughter into slavery. (Ex 21:7). Where is the church in this great need of the world? Largely silent or harmfully vocal. I can't think of another group of people who more desperately need church: who need to feel the love and grace and the living, giving relationship of God. One thing I have learned is that when a person hears something negative about themselves it goes straight to the heart and stays there. They may hear 100 positive things that dispute the first negative, but somehow these just stay up at the surface/head level. The only way to uproot the negative seed that has been planted in the heart is through love.

While we don't have their report yet, informally I have heard members of the Joint Needs Assessment Committee say that in the feedback from the questionnaires given, over and over people say that this is an inclusive church: a church that welcomes people regardless of differences. I believe that to be true. A woman in our congregation told me not long ago that she liked her old church but she always felt restricted. She was very aware and afraid that if they knew the truth about her, that she was a lesbian, that she would no longer be welcome there. Here at Wall Street she feels like she can breathe and smile and come closer to God without barriers in the way.

There are teens like Tyler in Brockville, some who are also thinking of taking their life. Of that there is no question. There are also many adults in our surrounding area who made it through those fragile teenage years but remain convinced that they would not be loved by people and certainly not by God if anyone discovered the truth of their sexual orientation. God desperately wants to reach out to these people but the only way he can do that is through the love of people who follow him.

This Saturday is a time to reflect and sit at the feet of the Lord for on this topic. But just spending that time in a workshop is also an action. It is safer and easier to sweep the issue under the old or new carpet and say sweetly we are in an inclusive church. I know that this is not a comfortable topic for many and Saturday's workshop is meant especially for those who would rather not go there. It will be a safe place to share difficult thoughts and feelings on this subject. We have been praying for God's presence and God's guiding and God's anointing for every part of this workshop. God is calling us to follow his leading and to step out of our safe place to reach out in grace and love to our hurting world. May we take the time to listen to God's voice and may we have the courage to follow.

In closing I want to leave you with words of wisdom from three sages:
first from Immanuel Kant: "To be is to do",
from Jean-Paul Sartre: "To do is to be"
and finally from Frank Sinatra, "Do be do be do!" Thanks be to God. Amen.