

Col 1:15-29; Luke 10:38-42 21.07.19

At the moment I am reading the biography of Dieterich Bonhoeffer, the Christian martyr, theologian and spy who gave his life after trying to subvert the third reich, in a plot to kill Adolph Hitler. Bonhoeffer was safely in America when he wrote;

I have come to the conclusion that I made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people ... Christians in Germany will have to face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that [Christian civilization](#) may survive or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose but I cannot make that choice from security.^[30]

Today's readings speak of the necessity at many times in the Christian life of being subversive in whatever culture or climate we find ourselves. Not infrequently this leads to suffering

Today's selection from Colossians can be confusing to people who hear Paul say that his suffering is "filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body which is the church." How strange... and what is "lacking in the afflictions of Christ?"

The author is reminding Christian ministers that we continue to experience what Christ did before his resurrection – we are suffering for the church. Our suffering is "on behalf of his body." Why this suffering? So that we can bring to completion the proclamation of the Word of God.

God's Word is made "intelligible," or understood by those who have not yet heard it, by the witness of Christ's ministers. Our willingness to make personal sacrifice for the gospel and, like Paul, to "rejoice in my suffering," is really a proclamation of the gospel through our lives.

He tells us that God's Word was a "mystery hidden from ages and from generations past." But now it is revealed by the lives of "the holy ones." By their lives and sufferings "the holy ones" reveal Christ himself. Paul is willing to "rejoice" in his sufferings because he believes he is serving Christ's body.

Evil forces in the world still exert their power over us, but those who live in Christ's sacrificial spirit can overcome evil and extend the work of Christ's reconciliation to others. How will Christ's reign be made known throughout the world? By Christ's followers who are empowered to live by his Spirit..

Pax romana and the Emperor Cult

¹⁵The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And so Paul again makes clear that his intention is to “present everyone mature in Christ.” (Colossians 1:28; cf. 1:9-10)

- A seditious maturity that says that if Jesus is Lord then Caesar (and all of his contemporary imitators) is a fraud.
- A subversive maturity that knows that subjects of the kingdom are not slaves of the empire.
- A holistic maturity that confesses that the scope of redemption is as wide as creation.
- A grown-up maturity for the long haul of Christian discipleship in the shadow of empire.

It has never been easy being a Christian in our world: not in Paul’s time; not in ours. If we are faithful and living Christ’s life, then we must make daily choices that set us against the grain of our contemporaries. Friction and sometimes conflict, are the result – and they are painful. Colossians reminds us that any suffering – material, physical or spiritual – we endure for Christ is not in vain. Rather, it contributes to spreading the Good News of Christ to those around us.

Are we all preachers? No, not all of us will climb into the pulpit this weekend to preach. But Paul reminds us that the message of the gospel is proclaimed through each baptized person who faithfully lives out the sacrifices gospel living requires.

Our Gospel reading reverberates with Mystery?

Why is it that Mary is said to have chosen the better way?

The Martha and Mary account is only in Luke and so we would expect to find in it and the surrounding ones, typical Lucan touches. For example, typical of Luke, it features women ministering and listening to Jesus

What a relief it must have been for Jesus to be "welcomed" by Martha. This is Martha’s only appearance in Luke. Martha’s sister Mary is also in the story and she sits at Jesus’ feet to hear him speak – literally, to "listen to his word." To sit at someone’s feet was to acknowledge his or her authority. Thus, Mary treats Jesus as one sent with an authoritative word, a prophet. Martha is often described as "the heavy" in this story – the one who is fretting and bossy. But initially, at least, she is the hospitable one who welcomes Jesus and tries to do much to follow-up on her hospitality. Since Jesus is journeying to Jerusalem with his disciples, I wonder if they weren’t close by. If so, Martha had much to do and could be overwhelmed with work and so feel abandoned by her sister.

Hospitality

The language and setting of the story of Mary and Martha are reminiscent of the social custom of ancient hospitality, generally understood, in the ancient world, to refer to kindness shown to strangers.

The constant social context in ancient hospitality scenes appears to be travel. Hospitality was a highly valued and presumably widely practiced custom among pagans, Jews, and Christians. Hosts were expected to provide food, shelter, amenities, and protection to these traveling strangers, who sometimes turned out to be gods incognito.

Jewish examples of hospitality also abound ; think Abraham and the three visitors, But one of the interpreters, Johnson thinks Jesus is responding to the virtue of hospitality, that is, the importance of paying attention to the guest. That’s what’s important.

Everything else is secondary. So, according to Johnson, Mary made the right choice. Mary's way of being hospitable was not only to welcome the Prophet in their home, but to also listen to his words. She has done what people should do – listen to the one who speaks God's word – "the one thing necessary."

The passage turns on the meaning of the "one thing." The "one thing" in Jesus' logic is the "best part" which Mary has chosen. And what is that? According to Jesus, hearing the word of God's messenger is the one thing needed, not providing for his physical needs (also Luke 8:15, 21). Thus, however important hospitality is in Luke as a social context for the spread of the Christian message, it is even more important to have followers who attend to Jesus' messengers. The saying is less a condemnation of Martha's frenzied activity and more a commendation of Mary's posture as a disciple.

Contemplation

But there is another motif running alongside the theme of hospitality. Yes, Martha, the host, has busied herself with caring for her guest, and she exemplifies ideal hospitality. In the subsequent history of interpretation, Martha also represents the *vita active*, the active life. Mary, on the other hand, represents the *vita contemplativa*, the contemplative life. She sits at the feet of Jesus as a student and listens to him teach. Both the active life and the contemplative life are needed; to choose one over the other can create a false dichotomy.

From Mother Teresa, a woman known for her deeply charitable activity, points to the true heart from which her motivation springs when she wrote:

If we take Jesus at His Word, all of us are contemplatives in the heart of the world. For if we have faith, we are continually in His presence.

Ambrose observed: "Virtue does not have a single form. In the example of Martha and Mary, there is added the busy devotion of the one and the pious attention of the other to the Word of God." Still, Christ gently reminds Martha (and Luke's audience), that Mary's is "the better part," because actions -- even acts of Christian charity and hospitality -- if they are to be sustained, always follow being; that is, what we do flows naturally from who we are.

There's another clue in the text that shows us how to interpret the passage

Also, the story is situated between action and prayer: the preceding story of the Good Samaritan encapsulates the ideal of Christian love and service; while following the Martha and Mary account Jesus gives his teaching about prayer. Are we listening to the accumulated message of these narratives? Does it take prayer to help us discern and follow through on our call to serve others in need? Will prayer help us recognize the needy so that we not "walk on by on the other side," as the religious leaders did to the man who had been set upon by bandits? The stories of the Good Samaritan, Mary and Martha and the teaching on prayer are intimately related – they need to be thought of together.

Lord teach us to be Holy and Upright subversives, to live lives which revere and honour you first, even when it means simply sitting at your feet, and learning theology.