

Holy Trinity Anglican Church
Reverend Michael Fleming
Lent Four
March 14, 2021

Celebrant: The parishes of the Diocese of Ottawa sit on the unceded territory of the Algonquin nation.

All: **May we dwell together in unity and peace.**

Celebrant: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all

All: **And also with you**

Celebrant: As we begin our fellowship together today, let us take a moment to pause and reflect on the fact that a year has passed since the Covid19 virus was declared a pandemic and we entered a new phase of existence. Let us remember all those who have been attacked by this virus and especially those who have died, their families and friends. Let us hold in a special place in our hearts all those who minister to the victims in mind, body or spirit and remember the families of those who place their own lives in danger every day to tend to the needs of others. Keep us mindful of the folk that we cannot be with at this time, sons and daughters, parents and grandparents, grandchildren, friends and colleagues and we ask the compassionate Lord to enwrap them all in arms of grace and love.”

God of hope and love, as our world seems more and more chaotic in this time of Pandemic, help us to open our hearts and minds to your peace. Sometimes, Lord Jesus, when we are alone, bombarded by news and statistics, we may feel lonely, scared, apprehensive and afraid that nothing will ever be the same again. In those moments, be with us so that we may feel your love surrounding us and help us to remember that you will never leave us. Give us the strength to reach out to other people to share our feelings and fears and to listen to theirs so that together we may find calm in knowing that we are your children and you gift us with all that we need, moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day. In all things and no matter how we feel, give us the knowledge and the wisdom to always give thanks to you that the gift of gratitude may help us to return to you and overcome the fear that threatens us. Bless us God who is Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Holy One, we come before you this day, knowing that you are with us. In this time of persistent change and unknowing, we crave your ever-present grace and in this space of many questions and too few answers, we are desperate for your truth. In this storm of confusion and uncertainty, we seek the constancy of your love. Speak peace to the fears we name in our hearts and minds. Calm the inner and unspoken anxieties that we carry; soothe our wearied and worried souls from the incessant angst that occupies us. For those whose bodies bear illness, we pray; for those whose minds are trapped in fear, we pray; for those whose spirits are devastated by isolation, we pray. Help us to remember that you are with us, for you alone give us strength and wholeness of being. In your holy name we pray. Amen

Celebrant: Almighty God,
**All to you all hearts are open,
all desires known,**

**and from you no secrets are hidden.
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

The Collect of the New Day

Celebrant: Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world, evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us and we in him, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

Amen

The First Reading

A Reading From The Book Of Numbers

They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"

Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. Numbers 21:4-9

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God

Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy endures for ever.

Let all those whom the Lord has redeemed proclaim that he redeemed them from the hand of the foe.

He gathered them out of the lands; from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

Some were fools and took to rebellious ways; they were afflicted because of their sins.

They abhorred all manner of food and drew near to death's door.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

He sent forth his word and healed them and saved them from the grave.

Let them give thanks to the Lord for his mercy and the wonders he does for his children.

Let them offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and tell of his acts with shouts of joy.

The Second Reading is from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians, Chapter 2, Verses 1 to 10

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

All: **And also with you**

Celebrant: The holy gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ according to the blessed St. Luke (St. Luke 10: 38-42)

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

The Gospel of Christ.

Praise to you Lord, Jesus Christ

The Homily - “The Two Sisters”

At the top of the Mount of Olives, in a small village called Bethany there is a house which tradition says was the home of three siblings – Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. We know very little about them except that on several occasions when Jesus was in Jerusalem, he stayed with them and often brought an entourage with him. When Lazarus dies, it was to this place that Jesus comes and shares in the grief and pain of losing a dear friend. The three sibs were most likely childhood friends of Jesus’ from Nazareth and they were probably early followers of his. During excavations, archeologists discovered a large stone press in the courtyard, telling us that the family was most likely involved in the olive oil industry which supplied Jerusalem with product from the many olive groves that dotted the sides of the hill. They may have owned the garden called Gethsemane where Jesus went often to pray.

One of the easiest mistakes we can make when we spend time with the Scriptures is to forget that all of the characters, save those in the parables and stories Jesus told, were real, living, breathing people. They laughed and cried, danced and slept; they ate and drank; they lived and they died just like us. They shared in intimate moments with family and friends and most likely shared a close community life like people do in small town Ontario. Unfortunately, we have too often added a title to their names – saint – and in so doing, we fall into the trap of seeing them as extraordinary people who seemed to have walked several feet off the ground. Many of them experienced horrendous deaths and we remember them for that perhaps more than for what they did in their lives. We need to recapture the truth of the saints – that they were ordinary people who did extraordinary things because they placed their lives into the hands of their God. So, let's try to see the two sisters for who they really were!

I grew up in a family of four kids – each of us was different: Berkeley, the eldest was a very smart kid who seemed to score 95 plus on every test he ever took; Rick was a funny, gregarious younger brother who was always getting into some sort of trouble; I was the middle son, neither brilliant academically nor graceful socially; and then there was Margot and she - well, she was the princess...enough said. We shared certain things like music and sports but were so different from each other in so many ways, and still are!!! This was both a good and a bad thing, our being different and like all families, we had our moments when our differences created tensions and conflicts and rivalries. In other words, we were an extraordinarily ordinary family. Often, we siblings played off each other's strengths and exploited each other's weaknesses, like all family members do. We engaged in moments of intense jealousy and were not immune to hard feelings and the occasional, "I hate you's" that most brothers and sisters speak. Yet, under all the tensions of our being so close in age (all four at one time under the age of six) there was a fierce loyalty and God help the outsider that mean-mouthed any one of us.

Mary and Martha were just like us in so many ways – each was strong in certain areas and weak in others. There is an expression in Thailand that describes the two sisters so brilliantly - "same same but different". Martha was a very practical person while Mary seemed to be more of a dreamer. Martha had a quick temper while Mary came across as being more serene in nature. I'm not sure who I would have wanted to live with more. With Martha, I would have enjoyed a very clean house with everything in its place and a place for everything. I probably would not have been allowed to do very much in the house because that was her domain and I would have probably tiptoed around a lot, fearful of disturbing the perfect symmetry of life with Martha. With Mary, I would have sacrificed a life of being waited on for moments of whimsy and spontaneity which was just not a part of Martha's DNA. Each sister was uniquely herself and they fit together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and each completed the other. Like all family members, there would have been moments of intense intimacy and moments of deep tension between the two and this becomes clear in the story we hear this morning in the gospel.

Jesus and his crew arrive at their doorstep and are invited in immediately. While the visit is a surprise, it is a most welcome interlude for the two sisters. Hospitality was at the centre of life in Palestine then as it is still today – to welcome outsiders into the family home, to break bread with them, to share life was the highest act imaginable. You can just see what happens as Jesus and his friends arrive in the courtyard -- Martha tells Mary to entertain their guests in the yard while she scurries inside and begins to do what she does best – she

quickly dusts and mops, hides stuff in cupboards and immediately sets to work at preparing a feast for her friend and his compadres. Martha gets into a state about how much food to prepare, how the pillows are arranged, whether there's enough wine to go round – all those things that reflect on her abilities as a domestic scientist. As she is getting deeper and deeper into her whirlwind of activity, darkness begins to invade her psyche: what if Jesus doesn't like the meal she's preparing?, what if he see the dust bunnies all over and judges her based on her housecleaning skills?, AND where is her sister and what she's up to while she's doing ALL the work?. Finally, Martha can't take any more and storms out of the house and sees – well, she sees her little sister doing NOTHING!

There's Mary, sitting at the feet of their friend, listening with eyes closed to whatever Jesus is saying and murmuring like a cat in a warm sunny window frame. In Martha's mind, Mary's just sitting there, doing NOTHING while she's doing EVERYTHING. Filled with anger or jealousy (there's a thin line between the two emotions isn't there?), she stomps up to Jesus and complains loudly about her sister's lack of engagement with the work that NEEDS to be done, even if she would have told Mary to get lost if she had tried to invade Martha's kingdom! Martha is hoping that Jesus will agree with her and tell Mary to help her sister, but he doesn't. Jesus looks at Martha and says, "It's OK, my dearest friend. Don't be so upset – what Mary is doing is important and valuable, for she too is enacting hospitality in her own way by simply being present to me here."

On the surface, it sounds like Martha has just been taken down a peg by Jesus but to read it like this would be to misread the intention of Luke's narrative. Martha has forgotten an aspect of the tradition of hospitality in their culture – that of being attentive to the guest, of making the guest feel that he or she is the most important person in the room. By sitting like a student at the feet of the Teacher, Jesus, Mary is indicating how priceless his presence is not only to herself but to her sister as well.

Our problem with the story is that a lot of us think that Martha is right on in this situation – Mary should have figured it out and gone to help her sister prepare the meal instead of just sitting there!

But, the issue is the timing – the timing -

I think what Luke is trying to get his readers to understand is a number of things: that all thinking and no doing isn't a good thing and that all doing and no thinking is a dangerous thing; that we need time for prayer and time for action and that each is a vital component of the other; that what James said was true, "Don't simply be hearers of the Word (Mary)...be doers of the Word also (Martha)"; that both are essential elements of ministry and that when either is absent, the ministry is weakened. Luke is also warning his people about our being overly distracted or over-concentrating on one side or the other, allowing us to avoid engaging in the part of the work which we find hard or uncomfortable. Luke is I believe hoping his community will see that both action and reflection are ESSENTIAL to ministry which is effective and powerful and that we need to make time for BOTH in our lives, and not just on Sunday! It is also a recognition that each of us is unique, just as we are different from our siblings and everyone else in our lives and that we need the presence of differing others to make us whole and complete; that God gifts communities with those whose strength lies in the practical ministries of maintaining and managing people and resources and structures

and with those whose offerings are of prayer and calmness; that each side of the ministry needs the other in order to be complete and that when one or the other is missing...

I am drawn back to a moment early in Jesus' ministry when, in Mark's narrative, he rises in the middle of the night, leave where he has been sleeping and goes to a quiet and lonely place where he prays and listens to his Father. Then, he returns and engages in the gospel work for which he has been sent. This pattern of action, withdrawal, contemplation and prayer, re-entry and re – action is the model for us all – that we need to make time to listen to and absorb the Word by intentionally finding that quiet and lonely place that lies within us every day and there spend time simply, like Mary, sitting at the Master's feet. Then we can enter the world of action (Martha) armed with the inner grace given to us in our quiet place. Both are essential for faithful witness. We can be both contemplative and action-oriented IF we turn everything over to God and let God do what God does – for with Him all things are possible. Amen+

The Prayers of the People

(With confidence and trust let us pray to the Lord, saying, "Lord, have mercy.")

For the one holy catholic and apostolic Church throughout the world, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the mission of the Church, that in faithful witness it may preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For those preparing for baptism and for their teachers and sponsors, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For peace in the world, that a spirit of respect and reconciliation may grow among nations and peoples, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer; for refugees, prisoners, and all in danger; that they may be relieved and protected, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For all whom we have injured or offended, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For grace to amend our lives and to further the reign of God, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

We will exalt you, O God our king;

And praise your name for ever and ever.

We pray for all those who have died in the peace of Christ, and for those whose faith is known to you alone, that they may have a place in your eternal kingdom.

Lord, let your loving kindness be upon them;

Who put their trust in you.

We pray to you also for the forgiveness of our sins.

We ask you to watch over all our parish family, remembering especially Zachariah, Marjorie, Cheryl, Jeanette, Roy, Emerson, Irene, Meredith and Mike, and their families. May we, by example, draw others towards the glorious Light of the World.

In the Worldwide Anglican Cycle of Prayer, we pray for The Diocese of Biharamulo – The Anglican Church of Tanzania.

In our Diocesan Cycle, we pray for St. Paul's, Almonte and their priest, The Reverend Jonathon Kouri.

In our Companion Diocese of Jerusalem and The Middle East, we pray for St. Paul's Church, Shefa'Amr, Israel.

The Confession and Absolution

Celebrant: Dear friends in Christ, God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy; he welcomes sinners and invites us to his table.

Let us confess our sins, confident in God's forgiveness.

Celebrant: Most merciful God,

we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us, that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen.

Celebrant: Almighty God have mercy upon us, pardon and deliver us from all our sins, confirm and strengthen us in all goodness, and keep us in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

Leader: The peace of our Lord be always with you.

All: **And also with you.**

Celebrant: Loving Creator of ours, we feel the pace quicken, the time draw near. We are filled with joy as we move towards Easter and our promised reconciliation with you. Teach us to follow the example of your Son, to be worthy of being called your sons and daughters, to be called Christ-ians. Help us to live each day as he did, turning hatred to love and conflict to peace. We await the new life with eagerness, faith and deep gratitude. You offer us new life through your Son and through the gift of your sacraments. While we see new life all around us, we don't always recognize the new life that you offer us. Help us to grow this Lent in an awareness of the gifts you have placed in our lives and a greater appreciation for your care for us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

All: Loving and merciful God we are aware of our sins and weaknesses. But as painfully aware of our faults as we are, let us also remember your tender love, your gentle and limitless forgiveness. We come before you filled with pain and guilt but look into your eyes and see the forgiving love we so long for in our lives. Help us to forgive others in the same way. Teach us to love as you love, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Celebrant: Lord, it has been a year since our world was challenged and changed by an enemy that we could not and cannot see. So microscopic yet so dreadful, this virus has

confronted every aspect our lives and called us to review how we see life and how we live among friends, neighbours and strangers both in our villages and cities, but across the globe. We remember today all those who have died of COVID, for the multitude of saints who continue to daily care; to the scientists and researchers who toil to discover the vaccines which will destroy this dreadful plague in our midst; to the front line workers in our hospitals, fire and police departments, seniors residences and long-term care facilities; to those who ensure the continuance of all those things we consider essential – our food supply, our fuel supply, our public servants who maintain the systems under which we are protected and governed; the caregivers of our parents, grandparents and children; to all the unsung heroes and heroines who have changed lives simply by smiling or doing small deeds of kindness. Lord, we do not know how much longer we will live in these conditions, but we ask that you continue to be faithful to us; help us to be faithful to you and the sons and daughters of yours that become part of our lives, even for a moment, day after day. In Jesus name, we pray.

Amen

The Dismissal

Celebrant: Father of all, you call us to be generous with one another, and to recognize in the faces of those who struggle the true image of your Son. Give us grace as individuals and as a society at large that in this time of such great need, we may minister friendship and support in ways which are safe to all those who are in need of the service of others today, The Lord bless us and keep us, the Lord make his face to shine upon us and be gracious to us, the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon us and give us peace today and in all our tomorrows. **Amen**