

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
Amen

So I've got a quiz for you – imagine the average life span is 80 years old – how many years do you reckon we spend doing

I need a microphone holder

Sleeping – 26 years of our life or 9125 days (plus 7 years trying to get to sleep!)

Household jobs – 1 yr and 3 months

Laughing – 8 months

Exercise – 15 months

Eating – 4 and a half years

Working – 13 years plus an extra year unpaid overtime

TV – 11 years 3 months

Holiday – 3 yrs 3 months

Thank you

So last week Scott took us through the parable of the Good Samaritan. A story of love in action and the practice of love. A story illustrating that God's love knows no limits and that we too are called to love God, love others and love self - all without limits

So picture the scene for this week's gospel – the journey with the disciples is continuing and they now enter a village where a woman called Martha welcomes them into her home. There are a lot of disciples besides Jesus, and Martha sets about busily with many tasks – we almost get a sense of fervent busyness – she has a lot to do to cater for all these disciples – they are

hungry travellers and they could do with a good feed! And Martha we can tell is frustrated with her sister Mary who every time she looks up from her busyness sees her sister sitting at the feet of Jesus soaking up his words and listening attentively. She is focused on Jesus, concentrating and letting it all seep into her consciousness. And so Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to come and help her.

And Jesus' response?

“Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing.

Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her”.

PAUSE

The thing is...it's a bit tricky – many of us who have sisters or brothers know that feeling of sibling rivalry. We know that feeling of “why am I doing this when you are sitting down doing seemingly nothing”?

But this time perhaps it feels different to that.

The culture of the time was such that it would be very “out of the norm/box” for women to be sitting and listening at the feet of a teacher. Rather a woman would be preparing food and welcome for the visitors as part of their service. And so for Martha to look up and see Mary sitting at Jesus' feet would not be what would be “right” or acceptable in that culture at that time. She would be concerned about that. Mary was committing what could be seen as a social taboo, and as ever with Jesus he was turning things upside down and affirming Mary and what she was doing.

Mary had chosen to sit at the feet of the teacher and Jesus said that despite the social norms of the time that was ok. He was transforming the opportunities for Mary and for other women who may wish to do the same. In simplistic terms he was saying “all are welcome”.

But there is also more than that as well – apparently when you look at the original meaning of “busyness” in this passage, the type of busyness which Martha was seen as “ministry” or “deaconing” – Paula Gooder wrote about this in a series of very helpful tweets this week about this very subject. So yes Martha was busy but she was busy in the service for others. Her ministry at that point was that of hospitality. She was serving others, blessing them with hospitality, one, as was expected at the time, and two, as part of her gifting to others. Martha was creating a space/a place of welcome for people to come to and feel loved. A space where people would know the love of God in their hearts from the warmth of the welcome they felt.

And indeed this hospitality is to be praised.

But the passage doesn't just say she was busy. It tells us that she was “worried and distracted” by many things. And as a result of such frenzied busyness and worry she wasn't able to focus on what was the most important thing – enjoying the gracious and loving presence of Jesus, safe in the knowledge and love of his presence.

She was anxious and edgy, grumpy and ill at ease. And therefore unlikely to be productive and certainly not gracious towards her guests or her sister. She had perhaps lost a sense of perspective.

The trouble with a lot of society today is that we are often (not always) but often judged by our busyness. If we can say that we are busy from dawn to dusk then surely that shows we have a sense of purpose and direction and therefore that is a good thing. There appears to be much credit for being busy.

But there is quite a difference between being busy and being effective, and quite a difference between being effective, gracious and doing things in line with our calling as servants of God striving to bring forth the Kingdom of God.

Currently at St M as you know, we are looking at how we can move forward, how we can develop in knowledge of God, how we can grow in our faith and understanding and love of him, and how we can be people of love in action – indeed how we can be a people and a place where love works! We've preached about it, we're consulting about it, we've talked about it at PCC and we've even written a draft strategy! And we are praying about it. We pray about it in one of our prayer meetings, and no doubt as individuals too. But there is always scope for new members of the prayer group and always scope for looking at new prayer groups. It's unlikely that we could have too many praying! What was it we said – never build bigger than our prayer foundation.....never build bigger than our prayer foundations.

Martha was busy striving to serve others but she actually feeling stressed and strained by it rather than feeling it to be a service for others. She was focussed on the job in hand which was to welcome and cater for Jesus and his friends, perhaps to the detriment of her spiritual life. Perhaps we too could have a tendency at times to become all consumed by what we think we may be being asked and called to do, and being busy about it

and not actually spending the time thinking and praying and sitting at the feet of our teacher and lord, Jesus.

PAUSE

Life is complicated, life is often busy, life is often tricky. If we're honest life can be like a rollercoaster – an emotional one. Not just our own lives but the lives of those we hold dear. Our lives can often feel like they are on one level full of joy and on another level full of many emotional and physical strains. We are a family here at St Mary's and so we feel each other's sorrows and joys and often feel helpless. But we do have our God of love and mercy and of grace. Our God who we can lean into and hold fast to. Our God who is with us every step of the way. And so we can spend time with him being comforted, being nurtured, being inspired, being held and growing in our knowledge and love of and for him – for he deeply desires us to spend time with him to focus, refocus and be strengthened for our lives of love and service.

And so today maybe that's something we are called to think about – maybe today we are called to think about what it is we do with our time and do we focus that time on our God, practically in service to others and also sitting at his feet and abiding in him. So that we can be focussed on both love God, love others and love self.

VOLUNTEER – and so I could do with some volunteers – I've got some tea lights and some notes – I would like everyone to get a candle and a note. In the next couple of minutes (I've got an egg timer) I'd like you to have a think about what it is you are going to do this week that will allow you to spend time with God, spend time at Jesus' feet, spend time with just him.

I'd love you to pledge to pray for certain things over the next week – safe in the knowledge that our God is listening and wants to be our friend. And when you go home I'd love us to work out when each day we will spend time with God - being nourished by his word, being fed by his wisdom, being comforted by his presence and being nurtured by his love. Work out when the best time is for you to just be – to be within his presence - just you and him praying for our church family with all its joys and sorrows, for the world, for and for the growth of our church in numbers and in faith. Work out when we will spend time at the feet of Jesus and abide in him as he does in us.

Let's finish with a prayer....

Loving Lord, help us to spend time with you sitting at your feet and being in your presence. May we be people of love, people of prayer, learning, growing and loving without limits.

Amen