

The Kingdom of God is NEAR: So Disciples are ... Engaged

A sermon for July 17, 2016

Luke 10:38-42

[Lansdowne UMC](#)

I'd like to shorten the title for my sermon today. "Engaged (and appropriately overwhelmed)...."

We're continuing our series on how we can be people pointing the way to the kingdom of God, and showing what it looks like when God is in charge of our hearts and our lives. Last week, we were challenged by the parable of the Good Samaritan to be **n**eighbors. As Neighbors (that's the N in NEAR), we see the face of Jesus in everyone we encounter. In the usual way of reading the story of the Good Samaritan, it seems like Jesus is saying "don't just sit there, do something!" And now this week, at first glance, he appears to be saying the exact opposite: "Don't just do something, sit here!" So what is going on?

We're told that while the disciples were on their journey, Jesus came into a village. We're not told exactly how he came to Martha's house, but Jesus likely did what he had previously instructed his disciples and the 70 to do: go to a house, offer the peace of God, and proclaim the nearness of the kingdom of God. And so Martha responds faithfully and welcomes Jesus. Martha might not be the one who wins out in this story, but let's give credit where credit is due. Martha welcomed Jesus, and her sister Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to his teaching.

I can't pass by this without mentioning how noteworthy this is. It doesn't make us happy, but in the ancient world, women did not sit at the feet of a teacher. That was the posture of a disciple learning from a rabbi, and it was a privilege reserved for men. But Mary assumes the

posture of a disciple of Jesus, and far from being rebuked, she ends up getting affirmed. Jesus does not reject anyone who wants to be his disciple.

Nevertheless, Martha is busy making preparations for the meal. She's not just distracted, as some translations say. She's worried, she's preoccupied. I think it's fair to say that she's completely *overwhelmed*.

Martha basically snaps at Jesus. "Master... don't you ever care that my sister has left me to do the work all by myself?" Tell her to get out of the room for men and give me a hand. Don't get me wrong, Jesus, it's great that you're subverting the gender roles that would normally keep us women from being disciples. But couldn't you do that *after* Mary has helped me fix the meal?

We might interpret Jesus' response to Martha in lots of ways, but he basically says, "Look, Martha, you only need one thing for the meal, and Mary's looking at him! Why don't you sit and join the feast?"

Martha was overwhelmed. But Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. Can you relate to Martha? Have you ever been overwhelmed? That's a silly way to ask the question, isn't it? Maybe a better way to ask it is this: From how many directions are you being overwhelmed right now?

We can all handle a few waves in our life, as long as they come one at a time and the water stays outside the boat. But sometimes we let the waves crash over the sides of our boat and the chaos steep into us. When that happens, we can't help but be affected.

Being overwhelmed isn't always a bad thing. We can be overwhelmed with joy as a child is born. As a child I remember being overwhelmed with anticipation for Christmas morning. I hope you've been overwhelmed by the beauty of a sunset, overwhelmed with love for someone. But frequently we're overwhelmed by things that shouldn't overwhelm us. Martha was overwhelmed because she couldn't do the

work by herself. She was overwhelmed because she felt like her sister deserted her. She was overwhelmed because it seemed like Jesus didn't care. And being overwhelmed by these things caused her to miss out on the main course-- the One who said "you shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

We do get overwhelmed, don't we? Sometimes, like Martha, we take on work for Jesus' sake, but we end up getting burnt out. And when we finally notice that the waves are crashing over the side of our neatly kept boat, they always seem to be coming from multiple directions at the same time. Everything is going wrong! Think of all the things that overwhelm us. There's credit card debt, and past-due bills. There's a bad situation at work, or no work at all. There's health problems, and the pain and discomfort that comes with them. There are addictions to alcohol, drugs, pornography, and gambling. School problems. Relationship problems. Sleep problems. House problems. Car problems. A/C problems. There are so many things to overwhelm us. So many things that preoccupy us. Our minds, our bodies, and our emotions can all get overwhelmed.

But if only it stopped at our personal problems! There's the problems in our church and in this nation. There's natural disasters. Then there's war, there's terrorism, there's other threats of violence. And then there are the people: parents, kids, friends... politicians, teachers... your newbie pastor.

We get it Martha. We're overwhelmed. Mary was being overwhelmed too. But Mary seems to understand that there is only one thing worth being overwhelmed by-- and that's being a disciple of Jesus. Being engaged as a disciple of Jesus isn't it's not something that you slap on top of an already busy lifestyle. It's the foundation on which your life is built. Actually, it *is* your life. Because when you experience

the grace of God in your life, it's a tsunami that overwhelms your old self, and then re-forms your broken human nature into someone who is able to love and serve God.

C. S. Lewis, one of my favorite authors, says it like this. "Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts [incredibly] and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."

This is what it looks like to be overwhelmed by Jesus. And getting overwhelmed by Jesus, starts by sitting at his feet-- from actually being his disciple. When Jesus speaks, you pay attention. And when Jesus walks, you go with him.

Martha was so overwhelmed with the need to attend to her acts of service that she missed an opportunity to attend to the presence of God in her own house! Martha's problem wasn't that she was working. There is always a time for the work of service to be done. That's called walking with Jesus. But first, we must sit at Jesus' feet. Jesus has to teach us God's vision for us and for the world in order for us to continue to serve others and the world. Doing the work but lacking the vision is a recipe for a Martha-like burn out. If you do not sit at Jesus' feet, you will get overwhelmed by the work, instead of by the goodness of God in your life. And you'll end up pulling a Martha. You'll blame Jesus.

How many people end up blaming Jesus because they've had bad encounters with the church? They've taken part in the time-and-energy-consuming ministries of the church, but they've missed the vision of God's kingdom come to earth in Jesus. They didn't take time to sit at the feet of Jesus. How many people will sit at the feet of the talking heads on cable news or the commentators on buzzfeed. How many people will sit at the feet of comedians like John Oliver and Jon Stewart? How many people spend more than 15 minutes sitting at the feet of their Facebook friends, but they don't have 15 minutes to sit at the feet of Jesus?

How many Christians are there who are overwhelmed with the cares of the world because they're not overwhelmed by Jesus? How many Christians lack a biblical worldview because they haven't sat at the feet of Jesus. I'm not talking about idealism. Jesus has no patience for idealism. This has practical consequences for the way we live our lives. Many Christians, for example, believe that God is going to throw the whole earth away and snatch Christians away to heaven. And when you believe that, then it makes no sense to care for the earth. It makes no sense to do anything but proselytize as many people as possible so that they don't have to end up on the burning trash heap with the rest of creation. But that vision comes more from the famous Left Behind series of poorly informed fiction than it does from sitting at the feet of Jesus.

And here's the problem for many of us: the teachings of Jesus don't fit in a 140 character tweet or a witty facebook image. There are big, important concepts like God, neighbor, sin, the kingdom, salvation, new birth, image of God, new creation-- it doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand them and live them out! But it does take repetition and time. It means taking on the rhythm of discipleship. We sit at Jesus' feet, then we walk with Jesus. We sit, and then we walk. We learn, and we

journey. We listen, then we travel. We sit and then we walk. And when we do that, Jesus' teaching mixes with Jesus' action to help us to understand what God is up to in the world. God makes those abstract concepts concrete in our lives.

So, let's get practical. Jesus is *always* practical. How do you sit at the feet of Jesus? How do you listen to his word and learn to be his disciple. It's really quite simple. You take time to listen to his word in scripture. Here's what I was taught, and what I do, and what I commend to you to adopt in your lives. Pick yourself out a book of the bible-- say, the gospel of Luke. When you get up in the morning, you go right to sitting at the feet of Jesus. You ask Jesus to speak to you, and you read about 10 verses of scripture. Then sit, and listen to what you hear Jesus saying to you through it. If you're like me, Jesus is easier to understand with a cup of coffee in your hand. Read it again, and listen again. But you're not done. Take out some pen and a notebook, and write what you hear Jesus saying. Sometimes that's just a summary of the passage. Other times, it's the acknowledgement that God is going to make a new wing in your living building. Once you've done this-- it'll take about 15 minutes if you give it the attention that it deserves-- you're much better prepared to start your day. (A mentor of mine calls this "your reading and writing"). We'll talk next week about prayer, which is when you talk to God. But sitting at the feet of Jesus-- that's when we listen. And when you do that every day for a year, then let me know if you're still pulling a Martha-- blaming Jesus because you're overwhelmed.

Once you've sat with Jesus, you're ready to walk with Jesus during that day. God gave the Israelites manna in the wilderness. They only had what they needed for the day. They couldn't store it up-- it went rotten the next day. Every day they had to gather the bread from heaven. We have to do the same with Jesus, who calls himself the bread from

heaven. We have to take time to sit at the feet of Jesus every day, or else we'll find ourselves spiritually empty, overwhelmed with many things.

Overwhelming forces will come. People will not cease to die, or betray us, or disappoint us. Disasters and tragedies will continue. But if you've first been overwhelmed by Jesus, there is no room for you to be overwhelmed by anything else. Jesus is your all in all.

Like a great hurricane, we cannot escape the overwhelming forces that will come our way. But we can and we must find shelter and rest *within* the storm.

There are philosophies and clubs and meditation techniques that help people deal with life. But what do we have that others don't have? We have Jesus. The church has the answer to the overwhelmings of the world: the word of God is our answer. The word of God who became flesh in Jesus. God, who did not snatch us out of the world, but who came to live with in the world in order to redeem the world and bring the fullness of the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. So we sit at the feet of Jesus and pray that Jesus overwhelms us. And when Jesus fills us-- when the Holy Spirit comes into us-- our lives take on a new shape. It's a shape that can cope with anything.

And then we worship. A theologian named David Ford says that "Worship is a habit that copes with being overwhelmed by God." We come to recognize that the Christian story isn't a story about us. It's a story about God's action in Jesus. But it's a story that God is writing us into. Choose to sit at Jesus' feet, and you'll be choosing the best part.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace.