

Sermon for Proper 11 C
Church of the Good Shepherd, Wareham
July 18, 2010

The Rev. M. Lise Hildebrandt (with thanks to the Rev. Eric Wefald)

(Bell rings) It's time for the Good Shepherd Olympic Competition! Are you ready? Here's what you have to do—I'm going to ask you questions—if you can answer "yes"—raise your hand—and keep it up until the question no longer applies to you. Got it? Let the games begin!

Who here reads and responds to at least 5 emails a day? 10? 25? 50? 100?

Who sends at least 5 text messages a day? 15? 30? 50? A winner!

Who keeps in contact with at least 20 friends on Facebook? 50? 100? 200?

Who here works at least 4 hours a day? 6 hours? 8? 10? 12? I don't want to know if it's more than that!

Who volunteers for at least one group or event at church or another organization? 2? 3? 5? More?

Who does at least 25% of the housework? 50%? 75%? 100? And they're all women!

Who takes care of kids at home? Who takes care of kids and parents? Kids, parents, and grandkids?

Who here is overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated?

We have a bunch of winners here in the Good Shepherd Busy Olympics. We are definitely one group of busy people. Let's hear it for our winners!

In our Bible reading today, Martha definitely wins the Busy Olympics. Jesus is coming—he needs to be welcomed properly, there will be other guests, food to be prepared, the house cleaned, guests need to wash up, drinks brought in, candles lit . . .

And Martha is doing all the work! Her sister Mary—what a slacker!—is just sitting there, listening to Jesus. Martha is the busy one, the good sister. So Martha comes over to Jesus and says, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work myself? Tell her to come and help me!"

Martha is the Busy Olympics Champion! She has won! The prize is that she gets to feel superior to her sister. She is full of righteous indignation—"Look at how much I am doing! Look at how good I am! Look! Look! Validate me! And punish my sister!"

So just imagine how shocked Martha is when Jesus says, "Martha, Martha! You are worried and upset about so many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen what is best, and it will not be taken away from her."

What a blow! What a put down! Doesn't Jesus care for Martha, who has to do all this? Doesn't he know that the food has to be cooked and served, the guests tended? Yes, Jesus

understands about housework and feeding guests. And he does love Martha—very, very much. That is precisely why he tells her to drop out of the competition. To stop the Busy Olympics.

This story comes right after the story of the Good Samaritan. The lawyer asked Jesus how to gain eternal life and answered his own question by saying, “Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.” When the lawyer asks, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan—that the one who acted with mercy acted as a neighbor to the other. Listening to that story, you could think that the Way to life is by doing, doing, doing—serving, caring for people, acting—and you can easily get drawn into the Busy Olympics. Feeling that our worth and our value to others and God depends on how much we do.

Today’s story acts as a corrective to last week’s lesson. Yes, acting with love and compassion for others is important in our spiritual walk. But that was the second half of the equation. The first and most important is this: Love God. Love your neighbor, yes, but everything we do must first be grounded in our life with God, our love of God.

So, you might ask, how do I love God? When my daughters attended nursery school, there was a sign posted where all of the parents could see it when they came to drop off or pick up their children. The sign asked, Do you know how your children spell love? They spell love T-I-M-E. Think about it—children know their parents love them, because their parents spend time with them. When they play silly games with kids or sing them songs, or work side-by-side fixing things, or teach them how to cook or fish or ride a bicycle. Or take a walk together or cuddle. One of my favorite memories of my Dad is when he would read us stories—his five children sitting in a semi-circle around him at his feet, while he sat in a chair, reading Just-So Stories or Pooh in his deep, expressive voice. How much we loved listening! How much we loved him!

Any relationship requires T-I-M-E. what we may remember most in a friendship or marriage are not the things we accomplished but the special moments we spent together. When we lived in Wilmington, NC our old neighbors Selma and Hazel would invite us over—“Y’all come and set a spell”—and they would provide us with chairs and iced tea and conversation. We watched the grass grow and listened to the cicadas.

Our relationship with God also requires T-I-M-E. More than accomplishments, we are just invited to “set a spell.” Like Mary, invited to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen, to love and be loved.

Martha is busy—her busyness is a way of saying to Jesus—Look at me! Notice me! Approve of me! Far from being harsh, Jesus gives her a loving answer. He says, in effect, “I do see you. I do love you—but not because you’re busy. I always love you—come and spend time with me and enjoy life with me, instead of being consumed by all the tasks.” Come, set a spell. Become refreshed. God is right here in your midst—don’t miss him!

We get caught up in the Busy Olympics, thinking we have to prove ourselves, or thinking that if we don’t do it, nobody will. We forget our relationship to God—Love God and love your

neighbor. Warning signs that we need to spend more time with God are: resentment, feeling overwhelmed, or feeling self righteous. Instead of worrying about many things, we are invited to pay attention to the only one most important thing—time spent with God.

So now I challenge you to another kind of task. This one is really hard. Are you up to it? The task—spending time with God. If you find this too difficult, don't worry. Start slowly, with small amounts. It gets easier with practice.

First, sit comfortably, feet on the floor. Close your eyes. Become aware of your breathing. Breathe slowly in, slowly out. In. Out.

Now, imagine you are in a room, a room where you are busy. Perhaps at your workplace, people coming and going—or at your computer with 200 new messages to respond to—or at home with kids and housework and projects needing your attention. Feel how busy you are. Feel how pulled you are in many directions. Deadlines and bills to pay and people's need to be met.

Now, you suddenly notice a door in the room that isn't normally there. Or it is the usual door but it looks different. An unusual light is coming through the door. You feel that the door leads to an escape from the busyness. You walk through the door. Suddenly you're in a place of great peace and beauty. Perhaps you're on a porch, looking out at mountains or into a forest or at the beach. Maybe you're in a fishing boat or sailboat out at sea.

There are two chairs or seats here. In one of them, Jesus is sitting. He is radiant and calm. When he sees you, his face lights up with pleasure. He pats the chair next to him to you. You go and sit down.

Silence. And beauty. You enjoy the still and the love.

Eventually, you start to talk, telling Jesus about the burdens you carry, the fears and worries that consume you. What do you say? You let it all out, and Jesus accepts it all in loving silence.

Then you wait. Jesus speaks to you. What does he say?

He holds your hands in his and prays a blessing on you. Hear what he is saying.

Then you hug and you leave him, starting back toward the door into your busy life.

Now, gently open your eyes. Jesus is still with you, and he will be waiting for you in this calm place for you when you next need to come and set a spell, to be with him.

Love God and love your neighbor. We can't properly love anyone else, not even ourselves, if we don't spend time loving and being loved by God. Let us pray. Amen.