

## **The Better Part**

Simple Thoughts: Part 1 “The Better Part”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – August 9th, 2020

10<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

**Readings:** Jeremiah 17:5-8; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 10:38-42

**Reflection:** Psalm 121

**Greeting:** May the grace and peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you on this day! I pray that as we join together in worship, in whatever way we join together, that we be united by one Spirit, serving the Father, in the truth of the Son. Let us celebrate the love of Christ that brings us together in God’s care. Praise the Lord!

**Prayer:** Lord, hear our prayer. Help us to be one people, following you. Let our hearts be warmed by your love. Let our spirits be lifted by your presence. Let us always live a life dedicated to you. Help us this day to join together that we may worship in the grace and peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 121

*A Song of Ascents. I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore. (Psalm 121 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 121 and hear of a God that is always there. God doesn’t sleep on the job. We hear that God will protect us and guide us. Do you see God’s help in your life? Do you put your trust in God to take care of both the big and the little things in life? How can you help to give others the kind of peace that God gives to you?

**Prayer:** Oh Lord, we seek your help on this day. Help us with those things that feel too big to ever overcome. Help us with those little things we feel we don’t need to mention. Grant us peace in our hearts. Be the calm in every storm and the rest after every journey. Guide us so that we may follow you in all that we are and all that we do. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the Common English Bible. Our first reading is from Jeremiah chapter 17, verses 5 through 8.

*The Lord proclaims: Cursed are those who trust in mere humans, who depend on human strength and turn their hearts from the Lord. They will be like a desert shrub that doesn't know when relief comes. They will live in the parched places of the wilderness, in a barren land where no one survives. Happy are those who trust in the Lord, who rely on the Lord. They will be like trees planted by the streams, whose roots reach down to the water. They won't fear drought when it comes; their leaves will remain green. They won't be stressed in the time of drought or fail to bear fruit.*  
(Jeremiah 17:5-8 CEB+)

Our next reading is from Philippians chapter 4, verses 4 through 7.

*Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.*  
(Philippians 4:4-7 CEB+)

Our final reading is from Luke, chapter 10, verses 38 through 42.

*While Jesus and his disciples were traveling, Jesus entered a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him as a guest. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his message. By contrast, Martha was preoccupied with getting everything ready for their meal. So Martha came to him and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to prepare the table all by myself? Tell her to help me."*

*The Lord answered, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part. It won't be taken away from her."*  
(Luke 10:38-42 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We begin a new series this week about some simple thoughts I have had during these last few months. The first of these is about anxiety and worry and how we deal with it. There are a few readings for today, and the one I wanted to focus on for today is the story about Mary and Martha. The other texts help to highlight some points of this text. My main focus was on what it really means to stop and deal with the anxiety of everything. In the reading for today Jesus is visiting Martha. Her sister Mary sits and listens to what Jesus has to say. Martha is preoccupied with dinner, with making sure everything is ready. When she comes and says to Jesus that her sister should be helping her the answer was "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part. It won't be taken away from her." Sometimes our first instinct is to say that somebody has to

make dinner. I think we jump the gun and we miss the point. Dinner happens every day. It is easy to stress about it because you are always going to have to eat again. The problem is that Mary knows that Jesus has come to visit, and he is sharing something important with her. In some ways, it is interesting that Jesus in this story could be anyone, and I don't think it would change the main thrust of the message. Because I think we are too quick to convince ourselves that the important part is that Jesus is there, and she needs to listen to him. But what if we think about what Jesus says to Martha and we strip away that Mary is listening to important teachings? And what if we strip away all that we know about what Jesus would have to say and teach, and everything about his message? We are forced to stop and think about the basics, the simplicity of what is going on. Martha is so worried about the daily grind, about those things that need to be done, that her anxiety has basically caused her to ignore her guest to prepare for the meal. The meal might be important, but there is likely a pattern here.

First Martha is going to be busy trying to prepare as her guests arrive, making sure everything is ready for their coming. Then she'll be so busy preparing dinner she won't think about anything else. Then she'll be so worried about getting everything cleaned up that she'll be busy with that. Then she goes to sleep. What do you think happens in the morning? She's busy preparing for the day and the next meal. She's in a cycle of getting everything ready and always worrying about what comes next. Nothing says that Mary wasn't going to help. Mary was just stopping to choose the better part as Jesus says. She was stopping to enjoy the company of their guests. Learn something important. Learn something valuable and wonderful. She stopped to not worry and enjoy herself. I think that is important because too often we get caught up in preparing for what is next. Out other readings reinforce that concept.

In the letter to the Philippians, they are told to be glad and not be anxious. That if there is any worry or concern, take it to God. That will bring peace of mind and heart. Basically, stop worrying so much and stop to notice what is around you. Don't be anxious but rely upon God. In Jeremiah, we hear that those who trust in the Lord are happy. They will be like trees that are planted near the waters. Their roots will take the water in and they won't be anxious when drought comes. Jeremiah's words were an especially interesting way to look at this. Martha is busy trying to be ready, trying to be ready, trying to be ready. Mary stopped to take it all in. I think it is an important message, especially in times like this.

I know this is a message I needed to hear. It's easy to get caught up in all the going on and all the doing. All the things we feel we have to get done. Its easy to get caught up in all the things we will have to do after we get those things done. Then we start to worry about the things that come up after all of those. We can get so caught up in the worry about what is to come that we don't do anything. Frozen in fear, we feel it is all too much. And we choose the part of our life that causes us the most worry and anxiety by saying "I have to do all these things, because what will happen if I don't?" But what if we take that question seriously? What will happen if we don't? I'm not saying we never get around to it, but I'm saying what happens if we stop for a moment? I say this because I have been thinking about how things have been different these last few months.

Sometimes, lunch has been late in my house. Why has lunch been late? Because I stopped to play with the kids. We got caught up in whatever it was they were doing. Maybe I was teaching them a new game. Maybe we were exploring something new together. We got caught up in just being. None of us was overly concerned with if lunch was exactly on time. I was thinking about that because it turns out we still ate lunch and it was still OK. Actually, it was more than OK because we would have lunch and discuss the things we'd done and talk about the things we'd like to do. Not the things we were worried about not getting done. Sometimes we'd mention the things we'd like to get done so that we can do some more things together. But in those moments, the anxiety falls away. Because we are enjoying each other's company. I've come to realize that God didn't put us here to always be task masters of every moment. God doesn't ask that we control everything. That we worry and panic when that control seems to slip a little. If anything, over these last few contentious months, most of us have learned how little control we really have. I think that might have been a good thing for all of us to learn.

What if we stopped worrying about controlling and started to worry about living? What if we didn't have to worry about living, because as long as we put our trust in God, that God will see us through, that we will get by? Now, of course there's always going to be things we have to do and considerations we have to make. We will always have more things to do. I don't mean that we never have any cares and we don't think about concerns. But we cannot allow ourselves to get so caught up in them that they become an obsession. Don't let them take away the better part that you've been given. It doesn't mean don't worry about safety. It doesn't mean don't worry about eating. We need to be safe and we need to eat. But if dinner is a little late because we took time to take in something good, don't worry about it. I can't imagine that even Jesus himself wouldn't help to get things ready for dinner once it was time. That if Martha had come to sit down too, and dinner was late, it would have been fine. Because there would still have been much to remember and much to think about, but Martha would have been there to take it in together. To celebrate together. Martha couldn't trust that things would be alright if she let it go for even a little bit. If she didn't worry about dinner and stopped to listen to the guest in her home. Stop to enjoy the company of her friends and maybe learn something important. And it is funny because it wasn't until she came in to complain that she got some of that wisdom, telling her not to worry.

All too often we try to put too much on our own plates. We give God the things we try to rank as the most important, thinking "well, I've taken God my concerns about the safety of my friends and family and those big things. I shouldn't take him the little concerns I have about everything else." Why not? Why not? Are they not God's concerns? Do you think God isn't concerned with the little anxieties that build up in your heart to cause the big anxiety? Of course God is concerned with those things! God is concerned with them because they are a part of you! And God is interested in you! Jesus wasn't ignoring Martha; Martha was ignoring him. He was a guest in her home, and she might have thought she was helping, but if all we do it prepare for the next thing we are doing for someone but we are never "present" with that person, we miss out.

So my message this week is don't miss out. Don't think you've got to do everything perfectly and everything lined up to be exactly what it is supposed to be. Try to just be for a while. Enjoy your life. Give your worries and your cares over to God and God will help you make sure they get taken care of while also letting you enjoy what you're doing. Maybe you stop and you read. Maybe you watch some TV. Maybe it is something that you think isn't important at all. And maybe it's just because you haven't prioritized your selfcare. But if you aren't caring for yourself, sooner or later you won't be able to care for others. If you miss all of the little joys that God puts into your path, sooner or later you'll turn to God and say "God, why don't I have time for any of these things?" Because you didn't choose to see them and stop for them. Maybe it's just a moment. Looking out the window and seeing the birds. Sometimes for me, it's taking a few minutes to read or work on a puzzle. Sometimes it is reading to my kids or asking them about what they are doing. Even if I have little to no idea what they are talking about, I listen. I make myself present in that moment. Because I know it helps them, and I also know it helps me. In that moment, I'm not worried about anything. I'm simply able to be the person that God made me. I think that is a wonderful thing to be and a wonderful thing to strive for. So in these anxious times, bring all your concerns to God. Lay all of them at his feet. Pour them out in your prayers. Heap them up before God! Let Christ help you with that burden that he so freely offers to take up! Enjoy being and enjoy doing. Enjoy living the life that God has given you. Because, truly, it is a wonderful gift. And truly he wants us to enjoy that gift. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** Lord, forgive us we pray. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we say and do. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we do not say and what we do not do. It is in our doings and our failings that we seek your grace and your mercy. We haven't loved you how we should. We haven't loved each other how we should. We are a people who are sorry, who humbly seek your forgiveness. Help us to live with one another in your mercy and your grace. Let us always remember the sacrifice made by our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ, that we may understand your deep love for us. May we honor that love by sharing it with one another, loving as you love and caring as you care. Help us to be of one body redeemed by one blood, serving one God. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed in the weekly update. If you are interested in online giving, please contact me. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** We go forth now that we may be ministers of the good news wherever we go. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Until we meet again. **Amen.**

## **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Bill Calvert	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Nancy Sowers
Aaron Carrell	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew	Nancy Hoke
Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ty Bradley	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Pat Nebel	Don Stewart	Earlene Shupe	Brenda Hurt
Anne Winkler Heinrichs	Robert Fryman	Ken Bushur	
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne & Charlotte Carrell
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Lois Woolever	Mary White	Nick Nichols
Family of Novella Claiborn	Leo Smith		
Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Lyle Whitley		

Offerings may be mailed to your local treasurer or addressed to:

Rev Camron D St. Michael

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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## **Our Current Series – Simple Thoughts**

I have had some time to reflect during the past few months and decided to put some of those thoughts down as a series. In it we will look at anxiety, stress,

August 9th – *The Better Part* – A look at how anxiety can cause us to miss out on life when we aren't paying attention to what is important.

August 16th – *The Back of the Boat* – It is important to take time to lessen the stresses in our lives.

August 30th – *What Matters* – When we begin to think about what really matters, we often have to look at the things that get in the way.

September 6th – *A Little Trust* – It is easy to have doubts. The important thing is that we learn how to trust.

## **8/9/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron**

Greetings! Time for a weekly update!

We are continuing in both online and in person worship at this time. I am thankful for all of the work that everyone has done to make this possible. As we return to in person worship, please contact me for details or see prior weekly updates for all of the current safety precautions.

A note, I will be taking a week off in August, so there will not be online or printed materials from me on August 23<sup>rd</sup>.

There are copies of the Upper Room available in Greenup in the box and at Cottonwood. You can also find the current issue online. The new Sunday school quarterly is also in the box for whoever is interested.

I will be continuing to have our worship services online and in print! A printed copy of the service including the weekly sermon will be available online and in print. The sermon audio will be uploaded weekly as well. If you'd like to be updated when it is available, it is on Spotify, Google Play, and iTunes. I will also post updates to the church Facebook pages every week. If anyone you know is not getting a copy and would like one mailed, please let me know. I am trying to get them mailed out weekly.

Also, in this time we are still working to keep the bills paid, our missions supported, our apportionments met, and our outreach working. As such, we do need your continued financial support as part of the church. Offerings may be sent to your local treasurer or to the PO Box listed below. I can also arrange to pick them up if I am delivering anything to you. I am personally grateful for all your continued support in this difficult time. I cannot stress enough that the church is still active and we are still together.

Please see the CDC website for information on the Coronavirus.

Please stay safe. You are all in my prayers. I will keep you updated as best I can. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your Church Council Chair or myself.

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael

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