

## “MYOB –Jesus”

Luke 10:38-42; Psalm 52 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn  
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – July 20, 2025

*Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might choose the ways of your mercy and humble compassion in all circumstances. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

---

Oof! That psalm is something else, isn't it? It is powerful to hear lying and treachery called out so clearly. The truth will set us free, and we will be free indeed! And yet– and yet... there is a level of certainty here that rings a quiet alarm bell as well. When some folks are clearly labeled “godly,” and other folks are clearly labeled “evildoers,” we do well to be careful. The leap from “righteous” to “self-righteous” is but a short step up a rickety pedestal. When scripture grants us such intense self-satisfaction, we need to be cautious.

The connection is not that obvious, but it seems to me that Martha had a similar level of certainty about her own righteousness in this story about when she invited Jesus into her home. She was doing the hospitality – for the Lord! Boy, oh boy, was she doing it! And it was hard. There were a lot of moving parts; this step had to get done before that part could begin, and the stuff had to go on the thing just right so the other bits would fit on the place. This hospitality was something Martha was determined to accomplish. She really could have used a hand. Where was Mary anyway? She was supposed to be here, acting as able assistant!

So when Martha finds Mary out there – just sitting! – there is no hesitation in her question whatsoever; she knows Jesus will agree with her that Mary is slacking off. “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” We need to get Operation Fuss Over Jesus back on track, after all! Can you imagine her shock when she learns that Jesus’ understanding of hospitality is so very different than her own? It turns out he would rather be deeply listened to than intensely fussed over. Who could have known?

It’s not that Jesus didn’t want any dinner. This story is not a denigration or dismissal of the tasks that were traditionally women’s work. The gentle admonition Jesus offered wasn’t about what Martha was doing; it was about how she was doing it. By turning hospitality into an accomplishment, rather than a gift, she had made it all about herself, rather than an offering focused on her guest.

So as we gather today to celebrate our conviction that all people are beloved of God, in all our beautiful diversity, and our commitment to welcoming those who have historically been excluded from participation in the church of Jesus Christ, what do we need to learn from these two cautionary tales? We have arrived at a clear truth, together as a congregation, and we now proclaim this welcome as an integral part of our proclamation of God’s love. We have committed ourselves to authentic hospitality. How do we proclaim that truth without indulging in the smug self-righteousness that colors Psalm 52? How do we keep that hospitality focused on the

beautiful breadth of all God's beloved people, rather than just ourselves? Where is the line between discernment and judgment?

Part of the reason the church is at this moment in history is because people within the church, over the centuries, took it upon themselves to set up the rules and judge whether others were following them correctly or not. It turns out that humans are pretty strongly motivated by being part of the "In" group, which is primarily defined by not being like "those people." So making those line clear and rigid became part of the way the church defined itself: "We are the righteous, and those people over there are the mischief-makers." As an Open & Affirming Church, we have declared that we are now part of the movement to repent of such misplaced judgment and arrogance. We have committed to following the Christ who tells us – when it comes to judgment – to mind our own business. We have confessed that placing our trust in earthly power rather than love led us astray. We shall now, instead, focus on hospitality to those whom the church had banished.

So what can we learn from this tale about hospitality that might help us do this better? If hospitality is not something we accomplish, what is it? What was it that Mary was doing? Was she, in fact, just sitting? Doing nothing? No, that is not what it says. She was listening. She was listening to what Jesus was saying. Could it be that listening is the most basic, the most vital, the first and foremost form of hospitality? If you have ever been truly, deeply listened to, you know the answer is Yes. Listening

is how we let people know their value. Listening is how we show them that we care. Listening is how we learn how to better welcome people and make this a place where they can feel at home. How can I make you dinner if I don't know yet what your favorite flavors are and if you have any allergies? How would we build a truly welcoming congregation without listening to the voices of those who haven't been invited in before?

The story of Martha and Mary can seem quite jarring. Martha is so stressed, so busy, and so resentful. She lets it all out in one brief tirade, and is immediately brought up short by Jesus, who concludes his admonition by giving Mary permission to keep doing what she was doing. And then the story is over; the chapter is over. The gospel of Luke moves swiftly on. I would suggest that we could see this lack of closure as a sign of hope, or at least an opening for hope. Because we were not told how Martha responded, we can imagine various endings for her. Surely, it's possible that she couldn't let go of her self-righteous resentment and just stormed back into the kitchen to make some noise with pots and pans.

But what if that's not what happened? What if she recognized the trap she had fallen into once Jesus named and saw her stress? What if his re-framing helped her remember and honor what she actually believed about hospitality, as opposed to being held hostage by the expectations she'd unknowingly allowed to be pressed upon herself? What if she took a breath, and realized how she could simplify the meal so

she, too, could spend most of her energy listening to Jesus? What if the whole conversation moved temporarily into the kitchen, where things slowed down enough to cook and listen at the same time? What if she got to have a special moment after dinner, just her and Jesus, while the two of them washed the dishes?

What can hospitality look like if it's carried out by those who are trusting in God's steadfast love? What can we learn from the hospitality offered by a green olive tree? We are moving into a new way of being church, one that will require that we do a great deal of listening. Our Open & Affirming commitment is not merely an opportunity to proclaim a new truth. It is an invitation into new forms of hospitality, welcoming those whose experiences of the world and of church may be quite different than our own. We could get hung up over whether the rainbow decorations are symmetrical or not, and whether the cake has enough sprinkles. Or, we could focus on listening, on trusting that God is leading this journey, on learning to expand our welcome more and more effectively, so that those who need the love that lives here can receive it. I pray that we will choose the better part. Hallelujah and Amen!