

Just One Thing Needed

Luke 10:38-42

The current Victorian Royal Commission into mental health issues in the community is a rather sobering reality check for us all, I think. Have you been following it? I'm no scientist or health care professional; but anecdotally, when I look at examples of people in the community like elite sportspeople or other professionals, or someone a bit more everyday like me, who talk of their battles with mental illness, it stops us in our tracks to take note. It's important. I thank God for the courage of people who speak up at this Royal Commission. People who were taught by others to be strong.

Former AFL star Wayne Schwass told the Royal Commission that, when he celebrated winning the 1996 premiership, he was "broken, spiritually bankrupt" and suicidal. He said, "I was trained to be a very good athlete. I wasn't prepared to be a balanced individual."



Over my lifetime, the recognition of this balance, and the very essence of leading a healthy life, has grown.

This is witnessed today, perhaps, in the wellness movement. There has been (thankfully) a growing awareness of all health matters over the space of my life time, I think. What does it mean to be a balanced individual?



Life. Be in it.™

Many years ago as a child, I remember there was the beginnings of a public campaign for people to exercise. It was called the "Life Be In It" campaign. Does anyone remember it? A campaign designed to get Australians more active and involved in life. Life be in it!

You know, it seems a little to me that the gospel readings we've hearing over recent weeks may be seen as something like God's "life be in it" calls to us. We've heard Jesus on the move with no place or time to stop and lay his head as he heads to the cross. We've heard him call people to follow him and not look back. He's sent out 70

missionaries ahead of him. And last Sunday, we heard of the Good Samaritan, the call to be receivers of life and healing and so grow as active neighbours with God's love in the world. God's life be in it.

And so now we come today to a scene which may seem a little out of place in this scheme, but one which leads us perhaps to consider what it is to be a balanced disciple of Jesus, a person in need of hope and life, and a person who has much to offer to bring hope and life. Jesus, on the road to Jerusalem, on the move, stops to receive the hospitality of two disciples, Martha and her sister Mary. Martha works hard preparing things for her Lord, whilst Mary sits and listens. And we may well ask, "Which of these two is being a Good Samaritan, a good neighbour? Which is of these two is following God's 'Life Be in it' directions? Well, how do you answer? Is it Martha? Martha is the one *doing*. She's the one who's opened her home to Jesus. She's the one serving Jesus. Surely it's Martha who is practising what our Lord has just been preaching. So we might think that the Lord would affirm her, when she comes to Jesus and says, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has

left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me.” Come on God! I’m frustrated and more than a little angry. What are you doing about it!? (Have ever reached that point as a disciple?)

But Jesus answers in a surprising way. “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” What’s going on? After all this ‘Life be in it’, urgent mission stuff, after all this serve your neighbour, good Samaritan stuff, Jesus affirms Mary, who sits at his feet. What does this mean?

Mary sits at Jesus’ feet. She sits as disciples sat at the feet of a rabbi who called them to follow him. And this was a radical place for a woman to be. Unheard of! The only other ones to be described in this way in Luke’s gospel are the woman who is described as sinful and who anointed Jesus’ feet in Luke 7; and the man who had demons cast out by Jesus in Luke 8. But this is the place we must all be. At Jesus’ feet, being healed by the wounded healer, good Samaritan Jesus, and being healed and made whole by hearing. Receiving grace is the place from which mission, ministry, and mercy begin, and is oh-so-needed on the journey. Sitting at Jesus’ feet. One thing needed. Jesus says in Luke 8:15, when explaining the parable of the seed which is sown in good soil and which grows and produces — “But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.” Good words for us, pointing us to a balanced life with Jesus.

Hearing Jesus, then, is the key to producing life. God’s ‘Life. Be in it’. And we pray, God bring your life in us. In us and through us. This is the shape and form of our communal starting point in worship together: Jesus here is the one who comes to our home, our church home, and serves us with grace. That’s why we start worship with blessing: our baptism blessing; that’s why we receive forgiveness of sins from God himself; it’s why the Bible readings are important; and why I preach. It’s why we value coming to the Lord’s Supper, and go with a word of blessing... all from God. Our worship together is first and foremost sitting with Mary at Jesus’ feet, as he comes to this house to you and me. That’s our rhythm and that’s what the shape of Lutheran worship will always be... sitting at Jesus’ feet, being prepared to be sent as disciples into the world. And that’s how we respond in worship too, with the prayer, praise and thanksgiving of disciples doing the *one thing needed*: sitting at Jesus’ feet.

So, what of Martha? Don’t we *all* sometimes get frustrated and angry as we seek to serve our Lord when there doesn’t seem to be enough help? “Lord, don’t you care, that everyone else has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell them to help me.”

Our reality as disciples is that we are *both* Mary and Martha. Mary sits at the feet of Jesus, the wounded healer and neighbour who bends down in love to save her. For it is only there that we receive the life of God. It is only there that we learn what it is to be truly human. It is only there that we are equipped to be neighbours, Marthas who serve their Lord and his people with the same grace, forgiveness, mercy, and love of God.

We share the twin heartbeats of God’s life in us: being served by God, in order to serve others, in a world where matters of health and living with stress and struggle with balance are a part. My friends, in the urgency of mission and service and life: Stop! And encourage and model for each other to STOP! just as we stop for just a brief time at our Lord’s feet to receive his Supper today, so find in your life, the time, the place every day to sit at the feet of Jesus. The one thing needed for life. God’s life for you. Be in it. Amen.