



'Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World'

Lectionary 16 – Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
8:30 & 10:45 am, July 17, 2016
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

[Psalm 15](#); [Colossians 1:15-28](#); [Luke 10:38-42](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.
(*Note to reader: Pastor Easton is walking about the worship platform with cell phone in hand, looking distracted as she attempts to catch a Poke'mon on her phone...*)

"I am certain there was a Charmander about 5 steps in this general direction. Hmmm. There he is! OK, let's get him. (Attempts to capture this *Poke'mon*.) Oooh, he got away. Drat and Double Drat! (Notices congregation.) Oh, sorry, friends. Got a little distracted there a moment ago. Let me put my phone away."

If you were nearly anywhere outside this week, you saw people roaming about. In spite of the hot sun and wilting dew point. Mostly young people, but people of a variety of ages were out playing the virtual game *Poke'mon Go*. *Poke'mon*—those little monster creatures who mesmerized my children when they were young so that we had *Poke'mon* cards and *Poke'mon* movies and *Poke'mon* Game Boy games—well, they have roared back into the collective conscience of millions of people in this new app for your smart phone. *Poke'mon* might just be anywhere—but especially lurking near historical sites or natural settings. Churches are often either a *Poke'mon* Gym, where your creatures can battle others, or *Poke'mon* Stops, where you can collect additional *Poke'mon* balls or other items. Trinity is a *Poke'mon* Stop, if you haven't figured that out already.

Now, much has been reported on the news about the dangers of distracted players, as they walk about and congregate and hunt for more *Poke'mon* creatures. Some folks claim that those playing *Poke'mon Go* are too distracted, and might get hurt. Apparently there have been a few incidents across the country. On the other hand, I never saw so many people willing to go outside for fresh air, walk around, and socialize on a hot summer day in Camp Hill. That's a good thing.

And I simply pretended to be distracted with my smart phone with *Poke'mon Go* just now because I wanted to set the scene for my sermon. Playing *Poke'mon Go* is only one of **many, many** things which threaten to distract you and me. Nintendo did not single-handedly create this human predicament. For don't we already live lives of distraction? And aren't our minds, energy, and time often consumed by these things? Certainly, some of these distractions **are** worrisome issues and reflect important aspects of our lives—a stressful career, the competing demands of family and work, financial struggles, or health concerns. Then there are all the little distractions of everyday life—traffic jams and crazy-busy calendars and appointments and surprising interruptions, our obsession with social media 24/7, and the powerful influence of current events that impacts our deepest

feelings. As we attend to these various distractions, as our minds are drawn to them, as we move from one distraction to another, we can find ourselves juggling way too many balls in the air. Unintentionally, we may drop some of those balls as we attempt to deal with whatever issue rises to the surface or demands our immediate attention. And sadly, many of us live under the misconception that the ability to juggle all those balls in the air is somehow a badge of honor, proof of our worthiness. So we just juggle faster, and expect the same of everyone around us. That's our reality.

That's Martha's reality. To be a woman in that society at the time of the earthly Jesus was to know your worth and feel validation by your ability either to (1) bear children or to (2) be the "hostess with the mostess." We know nothing about Martha having children, but, boy, do we learn a few things about Martha in a few brief verses here in Luke. Offering hospitality to a guest in your home meant taking up a multitude of tasks...help the guest wash away the dusty grime from their journey, prepare a place to sit or recline at meal, bring food and drink, and more food and drink, and take away dishes and cups that have been emptied. My guess is Martha positively excelled in this hospitality. As it should be for a woman in the Middle East in Jesus' time. The greater the hospitality, the more "stars in her crown"—or so someone like Martha (and her contemporaries) has come to believe. Juggle those balls faster and better. Dropping a ball is not an option. No, she is the hostess, Jesus is the guest, and proper hospitality demands all this from her. (And, to be honest, she probably felt more than a little proud of herself in the juggling.)

Which is undoubtedly why Mary's behavior so annoyed Martha. The other woman in the story, Martha's own sister, is no help at all. Won't juggle the balls with her. Doesn't embrace the many tasks a woman of the household at that time should embrace. Doesn't recognize the importance of proper hospitality. Doesn't allow herself to get distracted away from her guest. No, there she is, sitting at the feet of her teacher, listening to Jesus in rapt attention.

It would be easy for us now to go and pit Martha against Mary. As if one is wrong and the other right, one is bad and the other good, one is condemned while the other is commended. But haven't women been beating each other up for way too many years in order to validate themselves? Nor do I think Jesus was setting up some kind of competition between the sisters.

Instead, can we listen to Jesus' words to Martha and hear his loving concern for **her**? When she voices to Jesus her annoyance at Mary, and her worries about the many tasks yet to be done, what does Jesus say? "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part ..."

How clear can these words be, but to tell us that the person of Martha was valued by Jesus—not for her household wizardry, but for Martha herself. All the things she was attempting to do and do right for him were not the reason he even was there. Jesus was there in that house to be **with** Martha and Mary. He treasured their friendship, he cared about their lives, he loved them. He wanted to share the kingdom of God with them. Jesus recognizes how stressed and overwhelmed Martha is as she juggles all those balls (albeit juggling fairly impressively). So he gently reminds Martha that while the things she is doing

and attempting to do are nice things, they aren't the needful thing. While they are ways of being hospitable with him, they aren't a priority for him. The better part is being in his presence, soaking in the truth that in Jesus we come to know the deep love God has for us, jugglers and ball-droppers all. Mary allowed this to soak in to her. She wasn't better than Martha; she just figured it out a little sooner.

Have you and I figured it out yet? We live in this hyper-busy world, and we are quick to believe that our multi-tasking and frenetic activity demonstrate our capabilities and establish our worth. Or we shoulder difficult, sometimes crushing burdens, and think that we shoulder them utterly alone. Neither of those notions is true. If there is any reason we are here today in this place, it is because God wants us to know that we are beloved by him. God wants us to know that he is keenly aware of our distractions and worries, our self-doubt and judgment of others, our frailties and failures, some of which we may even have brought here with us today. And God invites us to be refreshed and restored today in the presence of our Lord Jesus.

Listening to Jesus may be where all our faithfulness begins. For having soaked in that truth of God's love, we might just find ourselves a little less distracted—and a little more able to embrace the possibilities of this life into which God invites us. **AMEN.**

Copyright © 2016, Nancy R. Easton. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org