

**Readings: Colossians 1:15-28. Luke 10:38-42**

Most of us are very familiar with the Martha and Mary story, and I think our sympathies are very much with Martha a lot of the time. I know that I can't settle into doing what I really want to do until I have completed the daily tasks first, and of course if one is having people round for a meal then those tasks become increasingly important. If someone isn't pulling their weight then it can be really irritating!

I suspect Jesus wasn't actually angry with Martha as such. I imagine him calling her name twice in quite a gently manner to get her to calm down. He has come to the house to spend time with them and others who were there to listen to him. We aren't told what happened next. Hopefully Martha stopped being so distracted and sat down with Mary as well. We don't know. It can be really difficult to switch off when one is anxious; and getting our priorities right is often a daily battle.

But Mary's attentiveness to Jesus' words wasn't a passive activity. Anyone who listens to Jesus is being changed into a disciple. It applied to Mary and it applies to us as well. Each week we hear God's word when we come to church, and I know many of you read the Bible on a regular basis as well.

To be attentive to God's word is vitally important. But sadly there are so many pressures in life today that hinder regular church attendance and Bible reading, and I really understand that. Young families in particular find that life revolves round taking children to one activity after another, and Sunday mornings can easily get taken up with those activities. I'm pleased that we do have children who regularly attend Junior Church. Like their parents, they will learn to appreciate Bible stories; and hopefully acquire a knowledge of scripture that will stay with them throughout their lives. Then this week of course we have the Holiday Club that the youngsters really enjoy, and I think the leaders do as well.

Although, thankfully, Christianity is taught in schools, along with other faiths, many people these days lack a good foundation in their knowledge of scripture. Faith gets reduced to the lowest common denominator where to be Christian is just another way of describing a person's level of goodness. A

quote I read this week said 'some people have domesticated the gospel so much that it threatens no one and demands very little of us'.

To be Christian is also wrongly equated with liberality. We are of course called to love all people no matter who they are, but it shouldn't mean that we agree with all lifestyle choices. To voice a traditional moral stance is unfortunately seen as being unloving and judgemental, and I'm afraid the media often seems to have joined in with the social engineering process. A Russian philosopher, Josef Diskin, has also described western faith as a pseudo liberal religion.

I expect most of us have also heard of G.K. Chesterton's quote which says, 'When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing – they believe in anything'. It's not that people have stopped searching for meaning. It is that the vacuum has been filled with answers that feed our own desires.

But there is hope. Recent statistics have said that although those who describe themselves as Christian has dropped to below 40%, 51% still feel positive towards Christians. Our lent course 'Talking Jesus' gave those who attended it a great deal of encouragement to speak about our faith when we are given the opportunity to do so. In fact God goes ahead of us to provide those opportunities, especially if we pray for them. Okay, some people aren't open to Christianity, but many people definitely are.

And what a message we have to give. I absolutely adore today's passage from Colossians. It is a beautiful and poetic description of the tenets of gospel truth. The mystery of God's redemptive plan for humanity has been revealed in Jesus Christ – not just for the Jews who were waiting for their messiah, but also for the Gentiles – all of us who have said yes to Christ.

Through the Crucifixion we can be presented as whole and perfect before God. Our sinful nature is totally forgiven – wiped clean through the sacrificial blood of Christ. Gnostics tended to add requirements to our salvation, but there are none. Paul's words in Colossians are probably a counter argument against those add-ons to faith. Some people were saying you must do this or that in order to be saved. No – we must not be moved from the hope held out in the Gospel. It is simple and straightforward.

We are reconciled to God by Christ's physical body through death, to be presented as holy in God's sight, without blemish and free from accusation. It

is a free gift: God's Riches At Christ's Expense – GRACE. No other religion in the world gives the free gift of Grace. It is ours alone.

Notice also what the passage says about Christ's status. He is the image of the invisible God – the firstborn over all creation. Fifty years ago the astronauts marvelled at the appearance of the Earth from the Moon. Science may provide the answer to how the world was made and also how we can navigate it, but God is the answer to all the why questions.

Notice how often the word 'all' is used poetically in this passage - Christ is the firstborn over all creation. By him all things were created. All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Then there is the description of Christ's role as head of the body of the Church. All the fullness of God dwells in his son, the one who reconciles us to God the Father through his blood, shed on the Cross. All of us as the body of the Church have that message to proclaim. It is the only reason the Church exists. Our buildings, our rituals, are meaningless unless they help us to proclaim the Gospel.

Mary sat at Jesus' feet to hear his words and she would become a disciple as a result, proclaiming the Gospel to others. We also sit and hear God's word in order to pass it on to others too. There is a world out there that really needs to hear it.