



**Reflection for July 29, 2020**  
**Martha, Mary, and Lazarus at**  
**Bethany**  
**July 29, 2020**

*Let love be genuine . . . extend  
hospitality to strangers.*  
[Romans 12:9, 13]

*Mary has chosen the better part,  
which will not be taken away from her.*  
[Luke 10:42]

This week we contemplate the lives of Martha, Mary and Lazarus of Bethany. They are the only people named as Jesus' friends, and his visits with them are among the most tender moments in the gospels: Luke tells the story of the visit when Mary sits with him listening to his teaching while Martha performs the traditional woman's role as host. John tells two stories: Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead even in the depths of his own sorrow and aware that his friends feel betrayed by him, and Jesus visiting them as a final stop on his way to Jerusalem, when Mary lavishly anoints his feet. In all these stories, we see the many facets of friendship and the ordinary pleasures that Jesus knows he must leave behind.

I have chosen Luke's story for the focus of our reflection today because it describes a moment of hospitality that evokes a particular longing in all of us in these days of the pandemic: How we wish that we could share an indoor meal with friends! How we treasure friends who know and accept us for how we feel and what we need at any given moment! How we long for a friend just to "show up" without explanation or preparation! Those moments of casual hospitality seem very distant now.

And the pandemic has required that all of us redefine what it means to be busy and what it means either to have too much to do or not enough to do. Even now, without the many possible activities that might occupy our days in other summers, we rarely accept Jesus' invitation to sit quietly and listen, or Jesus' assurance that we will know when we have done enough. As our minds race from one uncertain plan to another we do not hear Jesus say *there is need of only one thing*—to welcome and be welcomed in the present moment.

Luke's contrast between Mary and Martha should be read in the larger context of his unique portrayal of women who were leaders among Jesus' disciples. It is important that he does not set up a contrast between a man and a woman, but between two women—possibly because

stereotypes of women's roles were so deeply set and the contrast between what was expected and what was possible was so much more clear. All of Jesus' followers would have seen things from Martha's point of view:

Women were not allowed to study the Torah.

Women were not expected to sit at ease among male company.

Women were expected to maintain the household, to serve guests, to provide comfort. But Jesus teaches us why conforming to these practices is wrong-headed. Martha focuses on what is *urgent* (she conforms to the past), whereas Mary focuses on what is *important* (she looks to the future with hope). Martha **denies** her self, while Mary **shares** her self.

*There is need of only one thing*, says Jesus. There is need only to listen with hope.

*This* is the one thing that is needed: To listen.

*Then* we will know the difference between what is important and what is merely urgent.

*There is need of only one thing*: to give our souls time and room to grow into understanding what God has asked of us--to trust that if we rest, and listen, and watch, God will transform the world—and our own hearts-- in unexpected ways.

This story shows the two sides of hospitality: Jesus calls us to welcome the stranger and also to accept his own invitation. We must learn to be host and guest. I end with two very different poems this week because they show so vividly these two sides of hospitality. Rumi's poem urges us to open our hearts and minds to the unexpected, trusting in the foundational goodness of any awakening a stranger will bring. George Herbert's poem urges us to be the humble and beloved guest of Christ.

## The Guest House

— Jellaludin Rumi,  
translation by Coleman Barks

*This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.  
meet them at the door laughing and invite  
them in.  
Be grateful for whatever comes.  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.*

## Love (III) - George Herbert

*Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back  
Guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,  
If I lacked any thing.*

*A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:  
Love said, You shall be he.  
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,  
I cannot look on thee.  
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
Who made the eyes but I?*

*Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my  
shame*

*Go where it doth deserve.  
And know you not, says Love, who bore the  
blame?*

*My dear, then I will serve.  
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my  
meat:*

*So I did sit and eat.*