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Lent 2 A, March 5, 2023

Liturgy 7: "Checking E-mails"

Read: Ephesians 2: 4 – 10/ memorize Eph. 2: 10 NIV

I have a dear friend who reads my devotional. She's been a subscriber for many years. Whenever the story of Mary and Martha came up, I could expect to hear from her. She felt, and still feels, that Martha has been treated poorly. My explanation has always been the traditional one about how Mary was choosing the right thing. But as I read the chapter from Pastor Warren, I may have to rethink my response.

It's easy to think that Jesus is chiding Martha. Perhaps, what Jesus was saying to her is that she has to make room for both in her life. I imagine He would say the same thing to Mary. If Mary decided to go milk the cow, that's o.k. also. You can listen to Jesus as much while you're milking the cow as you can sitting at His knees.

That's the premise of our chapter. Learning not to live thinking, "I'm but a stranger here, heaven is my home" is the best attitude. We are to read our e-mails, which is a metaphor for doing work. I am more workaholic than contemplative. It is hard for me to sit quietly and listen to God. He needs to speak, sometimes loudly, to me. I would rather be doing, than listening, but then I chide myself for being less of a Christian.

I want to embrace our Lutheran understanding that being a farmer, a garbage person, a doctor or anything else for that matter, so long as we do it for Jesus is just as important as going on a mission trip for Jesus. God can use us both through our prayers and through our actions.

I know that some of you have a problem. It has become more and more difficult to escape the demands of work. The world, and our expectations, hold out the idea that it is only when we are accomplishing something that we are valuable. Sometimes, work and accomplishment can take the place of God. On the other hand, we can interpret the story of Mary and Martha to mean that we should only focus on holy things.

Just leave the concerns of this world to themselves and life will in the right order. I think that's the image we sometimes hold of the monastic movement, that it was a getting out of this world in order to become a better Christian. It may not have been as true as we think.

When we look at many of those movements, they held up prayer and work as being equal. Benedictine monks believed that working in a field was just as important as serving at the altar. It is very easy to divide our lives in two parts, sacred and secular, however the Bible reminds us that there is no such thing as secular.

We worship a God who is Lord of all. We are not living in two different worlds. We live in a world where God leads and guides us to the work He has planned for us. As we gather together, to worship and praise God, we are also sent out to serve God.

He wants us to be about our mission. We call it “Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!” But even there we have to be careful. It’s easy to think serving God is only about helping the poor and the needy, rather than seeing all our life as serving God.

There are many things in ministry I love. There are some things in ministry I do as my responsibility. It is easy for me to think the things I love are the things God wants me to do. But that is not always true. Some of my responsibilities are vital to my service to Him. God has given them to me to help me learn about humility, perseverance and to help build my character.

As Tish says, “Likewise, our professional and vocational work is part of the mission and meaning of our gathered worship. We are people who are blessed and sent; this identity transforms how we embody work and worship in the world, in our week, even in our small day.”

So often, we think that the Reformation was all about the restoration of the centrality of Jesus. Yet, in the Reformation, Luther also dealt with the issue that people began to think that being a priest, a brother or a sister was somehow a higher calling than anything else. In Roman Catholic tradition those things were called Holy Orders; they became a sacrament. But the Reformation said not only was Jesus central but that “all good work was holy work, which was a revolutionary thought.”

We tend to want to make a hierarchy but often times that hierarchy is based on our feelings rather than God’s direction. Tish challenges us to think about this important issue, “The Christian faith teaches that all work that is not immoral or unethical is part of God’s Kingdom mission. The Kingdom of God comes both through our gathered worship each week and our “scattered” worship in our work each day.”

God does not want us to compartmentalize worship from work. He wants us to see them as joined together. As we do all things, both work and prayer to His glory, we are worshipping Him. As we worship, we are working for Him. The word liturgy itself means the work of the people.

Tish reminds us, "...the mission of God (it could also be translated 'the sending of God') – the idea that every part of creation will be redeemed and rightly ordered around worship of the Trinity is manifested in an integral way in our work."

Our dilemma is, sometimes in the daily grind of daily work, we lose sight of that vision. God challenges us to return to His plan. He blessed Adam and Eve with work, while allowing them to enjoy His companionship.

In our 24/7/365 world, it's easy to become purposeless because our work becomes disconnected from our purpose. The demands of work, to be available at all times, and to accomplish things can become consuming, so that work becomes an idol, sacrificing other parts of life. That was not God's plan. He really does believe that we need time away. That was what the gift of Sabbath was meant to do.

Rather than injecting God into our work, he calls us to join Him in the work he is doing through our vocations. The idea is not that I allow work to become all-consuming. That is very easy to do. It is "very easy to make work and productivity an item for which we will sacrifice rest, health and relationships."

To return to my friend and Martha, it's easy to be caught up in what needs to be done. Perhaps Jesus' bigger concern for Martha was not the work that needed to be done, but her anxiety about it. That urge to get it all done may make you not only anxious but exhausted and you'll miss out on the greater things that God has planned for you.

On the other hand, I can be so enraptured to get away from work and world that I become an escapist. I walk around looking heavenward, thinking and praying all the time and sometimes judging those who are not like-minded. There I have become a sinner.

Tish offers us an alternative. Rather than being caught up in the frantic activity or escaping, do we see ourselves as taking the third way because it is marked by freedom from compulsion and anxiety "because it is rooted in benediction" – God's blessing and love. We embrace the mission which God has given us by taking that mission on and combining both work and prayer.

We don't abandon work; we don't retreat to the monastery. We see all around us the opportunities that God is giving us to be sent and to bless rather than trying to create our own blessedness. We look for the blessing that God intends for us while also enjoying the daily tasks He gives us.

"B.B. Warfield a professor of theology at Princeton in the late 19th and 20th century integrates the value of prayer and stillness with his vocation as an academic. He counters the charge that 'ten minutes on your knees will give you a truer, deeper more operative

knowledge of God then ten hours of your books' by saying that a right understanding of his vocation would lead to 'ten hours over your books on your knees.'"

"Living a third way of work – where we seek vocational holiness in and through our work even as we resist the idolatry of work and accomplishment – allows us live with work as a form of prayer." Monasteries actually had that as their goal in many instances. They would work and pray.

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They understood the need for balance in those things. God calls us to see that not only is worship and prayer vital but so is our work. We might think there are more important things we can do to change the world, but the reality is, through our work and prayer, we are bringing change to the world. The very first person we change is ourselves.

At the very end of the service, we get sent. I say, "Go in peace. Love and serve the Lord." You respond, "Thanks be to God." By that response you acknowledge that you're going out from here, is to work. Some of that work will be done by prayer; some of it will be done by actions. God joins those two things together.

Even in the smallest of tasks, we can bring Glory to God and help to change the lives of people when we do it in the name of Jesus. It is by Word and Sacrament that God calls us to be everyday disciples. As disciples our mission is to make disciples, who in turn, become the hands and feet of Jesus, joining in work and prayer to make more disciples. God enables us to accomplish His mission by Gathering, Growing, Giving, Going to His glory and our good.

Count me in: (select one)

1. Pray each morning that God would send you out to do the work He has given you.
2. Try to do a task you don't like without complaining
3. If you sometimes work more than is healthy, avoid email or work tasks after hours each week and spend that time in rest.