

Luke 10:38-42

July 17, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Where does faith come from? (2x)

Of course, we hold that the Holy Spirit gives us faith, but where does it start?

In Luke-Acts, the author makes it clear that faith comes from hearing.

You cannot believe unless you first hear God's Word proclaimed to you.

Someone who has already heard the good news needs to speak, so that others will also come to faith.

As it says in Romans 10¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

As you may recall, the writer of Luke-Acts spent a lot of time with Paul and Paul takes up the second half of Acts, so there is a deep connection between Luke-Acts and Paul. But it's not only in the Pauline corpus that we find this idea that hearing leads to faith. It runs throughout the entire Bible.

I think it must have to do with the fact that God spoke creation into being; God's breath is what makes us alive; the Holy Spirit is breath – pneuma; and we cannot speak without breathing.

The Word of God must be breathed out into the world and then it needs to be received. And where is the spoken Word received? Through the ears.

So, faith comes through hearing. The Word spoken and the Word received. To hear is to be blessed by one who has already been blessed.

And so while Martha is busy, concerned only about prepping a meal, she is missing out on the blessing Jesus is giving. Jesus is offering both Mary and Martha a gift, but only Mary is there to receive it, and Jesus is not ok with that.

Jesus needs both Mary and Martha to hear what he has to say, because only after receiving the good news can they go out and do God's work in the world - to speak what they have heard so that others will also come to trust God.

Now, I know a lot of women feel for Martha. They want to argue that Martha is being treated too harshly by Jesus and that she is right for being mad at her sister, but that's missing the point.

Yes, Martha is doing an act of love, and she is trying to drag her sister into it, but that's not the point of Jesus being there. Jesus is there to talk to them. To speak God's words of love to them, so that they can come to faith and then share their trust in God with others.

The only reason Martha is alone in the kitchen is because she's missing the whole point of why Jesus is there. Jesus' ministry is forming community, with God and others. God is relational, and because of that we are called into community – with God and others. Martha has it backwards. It's God first, then the meal.

And when it comes to God, anytime we think it's all about what we are doing, we have it backwards. First we need to sit down and hear God's good news of love, remembering that God acts first, then we can speak God's love, which forms community around God, and then we do God's work, which is testifying to who God is – God is merciful, compassionate, and protectively in love with each and every one of us.

Faith comes through hearing that good news.

Now, I don't know why the lectionary folks cut off Genesis 18 where they did. Well – I know why they did. The theme for today is hospitality, but if they would have just included the next 1.5 verses, it would tie in so much better with the Luke text.

Right after Genesis 18:10, Sarah who is listening at the door of the tent hears some amazing news – when the men return, Sarah will be with child. In her old age, Sarah will finally bear the child that God had promised them 80 years before hand. And with that, Sarah laughs. Sarah is filled with holy joy. She hears and then she laughs. Her faith is renewed. God has not forgotten God's promise to her.

And you have to remember that this is the same Sarah who had given up on God and gave Abraham her slave Hagar to bear the promised child. She had lost her faith in God giving her a biological child, but now her faith has been restored. Hearing the good news brought her back to faith and she was filled with holy joy.

Faith comes from hearing.

And the Colossians, they also got to hear that good news. Paul was always writing letters to the Christian communities he started so that they would always hear the good news of God's love for them and not lose faith as Sarah had done.

The good news is spoken and it is received through the ears, or eyes for those who are deaf, and then the one who receives it is set free. In freedom, we are then able to share God's amazing news of unconditional love with others, because it's not constricting.

To hear that God cuts right through all the junk of the world, to come straight into our very being, to be closer to us than we are even to ourselves, is freeing, life giving news. Only in freedom can we set others free.

So, it is of utmost importance that we hear the good news and that we then speak the good news, only then can we act the good news, with others.

It's never about being responsible for getting some task done, as Martha thinks that it is. Martha has forgotten the Shema that Jews recite every day from Deuteronomy 6:4 – Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. Basically, the first commandment. God is God and we are not. So, it is never up to us alone as a single individual. Not even to prepare a meal for Jesus, because God always acts first, and then we can only respond as a community, the body of Christ.

So, first we hear. That leads to trust. In trust we are part of the community. And only then can we act, because it's not about us. It's about God and God's will.

Our worship services are even set up to reflect that. We come. We hear. We commune. We go and do. Faith encouraged and restored here through hearing enables us to trust and enact hope in the world.

The name Martha means lady, and Martha had fallen into the societal expectation of what being a lady – a woman - meant. At that time, women didn't study God's Word. A woman made sure that the guest was fed while the men chatted, but you'll notice that there is no mention of Lazarus here. There seems to be no man in the house.

Mary, the opposite of Martha, is studying the Word of God, she is listening to Jesus speak, which Jesus has invited her to do. Mary, whose name means bitter, which was a subtle declaration against Roman occupation as there were many Maries running around – was sitting at Jesus feet just as a male disciple would do.

Mary was also a name for hope, because Moses' sister's name was Miriam – Mary is the Greek form of the Hebrew Miriam. So, there was also in the midst of bitterness against Rome hope for God's deliverance, just as Moses led the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt.

So, the name *Mary* is simultaneously lament, protest, and hope, and she is the one sitting at Jesus' feet. Lament and protest against Roman oppression and hope in God's deliverance is seated at Jesus' feet.

Mary sits at Jesus' feet and she hears the good news through her own ears. Martha, trapped in the societal expectations of what a lady is, is called to shed the shackles of societal oppression and come sit – come sit at Jesus' feet in order to hear the good news and to be set free – free from having to be anything other than God's beloved child – to trust in God instead of herself or any other human being.

And so our lesson from Martha today is to notice the distractions that call us to be busy and pull us away from sitting at Jesus' feet and hearing God's words of love. When and why does it happen?

And, I know I'm preaching to the choir here. I know you are good about listening to God's Word, because you are here. So, I ask you - how good are you at speaking the good news?

Do you share the good news with others? If you see someone being oppressed by the expectations of the world, do you sit with them and let them know that God already loves them entirely because they were born a child of God? Do you set them free from being abused by the system?

God loves us first. It's not earned and cannot be removed by what we do. All we can do is respond to God's love, and God asks us to respond to that good news by simply telling others of God's love for them. To tell them they are already loved, so that they can be set free to trust God and to laugh, as Sarah did in the tent at Mamre, the holy laughter of faith.

And Sarah, hidden in the tent, is a good reminder that some people may be listening to us that we don't even know are there.

Words matter, because the Word of God matters, and faith comes from hearing.

So, let us also give thanks to God for all those who have spoken God's Word to us. They heard and then they spoke. We hear and so we speak, because God's living and life-giving Word of love is active here among us today, bringing faith, hope, and laughter into the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.