

Distracted Living
Luke 10:25-37; 38-42
7/18/10

A man sat at metro station in Washington DC and started to play the violin; it was a cold January morning. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time, since it was rush hour, it was calculated that thousands of people went through the station, most of them on their way to work.

Three minutes went by and a middle aged man noticed there was a musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds and then hurried up to meet his schedule. A minute later, the violinists receive his first dollar tip: a woman threw the money into the till without stopping continued to walk.

A few minutes later, someone leaned against the wall to listen to him, but the man looked at his watch and started to walk again. Clearly he was late for work. The one who paid the most attention was a 3 year old boy. His mother tagged him along, hurried, but the kid stopped to look at the violinist. Finally the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk turning his head all the time. This action was repeated by several other children. All the parents, without exception, forced them to move on.

In the 45 minutes the musician played, only 6 people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk their normal pace. He collected \$32. When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

No one knew this, but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written with a violin worth 3.5 million dollars. Two days before his playing in the subway, Joshua Bell sold out at the theater in Boston and the seats averaged \$100.

This is a real story. Joshua Bell playing incognito in the metro station was organized by the Washington Post as part of a social experiment about perception, taste, and priorities of people. The outlines were in a common place at an inappropriate hour – Do we perceive beauty? Do we stop to appreciate it? Do we recognize the talent in an unexpected context?

Possible conclusion - if we do not have a moment to stop and listen to one of the best musicians in the world playing the best music ever written, how many other things are we missing?

Jesus and his disciples arrive in another town. We are not sure if they all arrived at Martha house or just Jesus. The text says “He (Jesus) entered a town where a certain woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.” Her sister, Mary, is sitting at Jesus feet listening to him. Martha had a list of things to do to get ready for her guest or guests. We are told she was

distracted by her many tasks. She comes to Jesus asking, “Do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me.” Jesus surprises her with, Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is only one thing needed and Mary has chosen the better part.

Retell the story...

Martha is a good woman. The word used to describe her welcoming Jesus is the word for serving people. It is the Biblical term describing what the church is called to do. Her problem is not being hospitable but that she is distracted. Distracted means diverted, pulled in many directions, and drawn away. This is a challenging passage because Martha is not doing anything necessarily wrong – but more too much of what is right.

I am sure we all have spent our energy cleaning the house, cooking, or mowing the yard. We want our home to look its best. What happens when we are in the middle of cleaning or mowing and a neighbor stops by to chat or family members drops in to ask a few questions? Distracted...wanting to get back to finishing your chores?

This happened last weekend. I was sitting at a desk working on finances and writing some bills. I was squeezing this in before Pam arrived and we watched a movie with the boys. John, swimming buddy, bought a new motorcycle. He came over the house, unannounced, to show me and the kids. He brought his daughter. Jonathan and Jesse come out to take a look. Gracie wants to show Sarah, his daughter, our house since she has never been over. I am standing in the drive way distracted, thinking to myself, “Hurry and leave, I want to finish the bills and balance my account,” as I smile and make nice comments about the motorcycle.

There is a time to do something and a time to not do something or at least do less. Looking back I want to push my agenda out of my mind and invite John and Sarah in to the house. I was too distracted – one thing is needed and I did not choose it.

This passage is about making the right decision and avoiding distractions. There are two sides to hospitality – listening and doing; waiting and action; pausing and serving. This passage is about the listening, waiting, and pausing. The previous story of the Good Samaritan is about doing, action, and serving. The two passages are connected. It is not surprising that the writer, Luke, connects the two. He finished the one story with “Go and do likewise” and immediately moves into a story about not doing but just being present to listen to Jesus.

Life is full of distractions – Distractions pulling us away from our relationship with Jesus.

Distraction #1 – Responsibilities/chores

Martha felt responsible to cook food and clean.

We often want our homes and yards to look good so we look good. It makes us feel valuable when our guest says, “I love your house, and you have decorated it so nicely.” Nothing wrong with this unless it becomes a distraction.

Distraction #2 – Performance-oriented

We live in a society that has become very fast with information and processing. We expect people to have cell phones and answering machines at home so we can contact them immediately or leave a message. Email has become a way to communicate quickly at any time of the day or night. We just send the message and let it go expecting the recipient to answer the next day. We are moving faster and faster, multi-tasking to get more done in a small amount of time. Our society expects lots of tasks completed, lots of information processed, and lots of accomplishments made. Linda Stone, technologists calls this a disease of the internet age. She says it has created a ‘Continuous partial attention.’ More work is getting done and fewer relationships are being developed.

Distraction #3 – Expectations

What kind of expectations do we put on ourselves or do others put on us. Parents, sisters, brothers, and children of all ages put expectations on us. Sometimes these expectations are a reality and sometimes we imagine them in our minds. This often is noticed in comments like, “I should be doing this” or “I ought to be...”

Pam and I do not imagine the expectations our children put on us – dinner, wash clothes, buy clothes, etc. We have had several “heated discussions” about responsibility, expectations, and respect.

Where do you feel your obligations? Are they real? More importantly are they fair? And most important, who is making the expectation on us God or people?

Distraction #4 - Rivalry and comparisons

This is most popular in families and work places. Martha is working hard and sees her sister sitting at Jesus’ feet listening to him. She sees what Mary is doing or not doing. It is probably not a situation where Martha wants to sit at Jesus’ feet too. She is not thinking that since her distraction is pulling her away. “Don’t you care that my sister is not helping me do the work? Tell her to help me.”

Why can’t I stay up later, the boys get to stay up as long as they want?

Why do we have so many chores, Gracie’s chores are easy?

This is very dangerous in the church – I do so much more than most people...make me more spiritual and more loved by God.

It is much easier to look at others, calculate what they are doing wrong, and recognize what is not fair to us!

Distraction #5 – Triangulation

We have all done this and had it done to us. Instead of Martha going to Mary and asking for her help, she goes to Jesus trying to get him to side with her. Churches, families, friends,

schools, jobs, and neighbors all do this. Triangulation attempts to unify two or more against someone. It also helps a person avoid their responsibility.

When a person gossips, you can bet there is some secret triangulation going on. Churches are famous for this. I am mad at the pastor. How many times have I found out that I hurt someone's feelings by someone else telling me? I can't remember time a person coming to me to tell me I hurt their feelings.

Recognize distractions pulling us away from Jesus...