

Proper 11 Year C

When I was in the process of discerning a call to the priesthood, some twenty years ago, I often found myself anxious and fretful, unsure about how things might turn out. Katharine and I spent many nights crying at the dinner table over the uncertainty of it all...How would we pay for three children's education...what would leaving home as a family for the first time be like...what would it be like living in a big city eight hundred and fifty miles from the only home we knew...a new doctor, a new dentist, new hair stylist, car tags...and sure enough as friends had told us we found the physical moving itself incredibly disorienting...waking up in the middle of the night in a strange room...the bathroom not where it was supposed to be...It was the hardest thing our family ever had to do...

During the discernment process I was fortunate to have a fine mentor and friend (and a good therapist) who at the time was the rector of Nativity parish in Dothan...he would listen patiently to my vacillations between being all fired up and sure of myself.... to my fears and doubts....and one day he told me that amid the highs and the lows...the stress and strain...the elation and the fear...to keep my eyes on the horizon...to look far down the road as best I could and affix my eyes on the purpose of all this in the first place....It was good advice...but hard work to actually do it...this paying

attention to the heart of the matter...the meaning of why we are here...the trajectory of being human, and wanting to live an authentic life...it is still hard work for me. So there are still times when I remind myself to look to the horizon.

But having said that... my idea of what that really means has changed over the years. I have learned that one can't look to the future, not really. We can make plans for the way ahead, but more often than not, things just don't turn out the way we planned. I was taught in business to set long term goals, only to amend my thinking because of new circumstances, unseen variables; new possibilities. Perhaps the horizon is much closer than we think. Maybe the meaning and purpose of it all is in the process of living itself. Maybe another word for horizon is vision... Look to the vision of the good and the true, right here, right now.

In last week's Gospel reading we heard a story about how to love our neighbor...in this passage read today which follows directly after the story of the good Samaritan we hear a story about how to love God...and of course the two...love of neighbor and love of God are intimately connected, as Jesus tells us...inseparable, as a matter of fact...We are being told in this gospel the true nature of ourselves...who we are and to what purpose we are called...a glimpse of the horizon of being...the horizon glimpsed in our

daily life's work, the horizon not far, not in the future, but very near....we would see it, if we would but pay attention.... If we had vision.

The brief story today in Luke is a familiar one...the story of Martha and Mary being paid a visit by Jesus on his way to Jerusalem...Martha receives Jesus into her home...we are told her sister Mary was with her...Martha is busy preparing the meal while Mary is listening to Jesus teach...Martha asks Jesus to encourage Mary to help out with the work in the house...and Jesus says to Martha that Mary has chosen the better part...we've all heard the sermon preached that it is better to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen than to be burdened with busyness...the preacher often exhorts us to turn away from the busyness of life, the distractions of the every day... and look to Jesus for true meaning.... whatever that means.

But let's take a little closer look: The Greek word for tasks, that which has Martha distracted, is *deaconos*....which means servant ministry...It's the word from which we get the word deacon...the two women are referred to as sisters, but in light of the context of Martha being called deacon or minister, Mary is more likely to be a sister in the faith...Earlier in Chapter ten Jesus sends the seventy out two by two to announce and enact God's good news...so Mary and Martha here, the two of them...are two partners in ministry. On the surface this setting is a typical domestic scene, but it

becomes a rich metaphor for much more...a metaphor that has the horizon in mind...this snapshot of Mary and Martha is a composite of how to do effective ministry, which in short is how we love God, how we are meant to live...certainly this is not about choosing between the work of ministry on the one hand, and the contemplation of the word on the other...instead, Luke is telling us we need both...Hard work of the everyday, and enlightened and inspired dispensation toward the horizon, the word calling us... vision, in short...the horizon, the literal intersection point between heaven and earth.

Martha is worn out...not from her many so-called tasks of doing housework...Martha is worn out from much ministry, much living...and Jesus is telling her that the better part for her right now is the source...the living word, which rejuvenates, renews and empowers...the horizon, the intersection point, of the true self and the divine that calls us...inspires us into the future, our exhaustion and frustration and fear notwithstanding... we just have to pay attention to it, that deep inner voice that knows the truth...Jesus tells her that amid her vital work, her warm hospitality, her ministry, she is to raise her eyes to the horizon...the word, the truth, ...raise her eyes to the endless horizon of imaginative possibility, which is the very life of faith.... Faith is not so much about belief as it is about possibility.... She is to raise her eyes to the possibility of a world made new...the

possibility of a just world in which well-being and dignity are shared by all...the possibility of a world made new quite literally through artful sacrifice....that our work belongs to God's promise of the good...that there is always a way ahead...perhaps that is what hope is: the knowledge of possibility.

What Luke is telling us here good people is that Christian ministry is full time work...and not just the busy work, though the busy work is vital....if Martha had left the kitchen and joined Mary at the feet of Jesus there would have been a lot of hungry guests in the house...Luke is telling us that Christian ministry is about the engagement of body, heart, soul and mind... and attending to the health of each, the rudiments of mature ministry....he is describing the artful balance of living in the faith....and that takes everything of us....I think the real question for us, and it scares me half to death...the question is, are we willing to give all we are for this gospel? Our work, our enlightened intuition, our study, our worship and prayer, our humility, our privilege, our power....God wants it all....so that God may ably love the world into its perfection....and in this passage we are told how one might give all...and that all of us is all that is needed.... And that the horizon is here and now, woven into the fabric of the every day. Heaven meets earth in the process of living. That is the vision of the Gospel.

And we must find nurture in the midst of this our work, the nurture of the vision. That's why church matters.... We must be nurtured by the vision else the work loses its meaning and we grow tired and distracted....And we can't stay at the so-called feet of Jesus either, pondering every nuance of the knowledge of the word....we have to go out and enact it....word and work...word and work...the rhythm of the faith.... Word given to us through our being open to the truth and to the possibility of truth; and work, given to us in the present moment; what life gives us.... Word and work, the rhythm of the very universe in its quest to be fully known, and we known in it. It all boils down to paying attention along life's journey: intentionality, consciousness. That is what prayer is all about: paying attention along the way.

Brothers and sisters, we are made for the truth, and it is the truth that will keep our eyes focused on the horizon. It is truth that keeps us on the path of God's justice; God's will in its becoming. So we must always stand for the truth so that the road signs along the journey remain clear to our travelling companions and for all to see. We live in an age where falsehood purports to be the truth; perhaps that has always been the case... but in our present reality, we have this phenomenon known as willful ignorance, which is at its heart a choice to turn from the truth; to welcome the torpor of

distraction. Maybe that's because the truth is hard work, and it takes commitment. But such falsehood seems all the more prominent these days. Certainly it is more pervasive than I've seen in my lifetime. The great theologian Karl Barth admonished us preachers to speak with the bible in one hand and the New York Times in the other.... So that's what I'm going to do: Our elected officials, those entrusted to manage our marvelous democracy, lie to us, and are not held accountable. And I think as people of faith we are duty bound to name such falsehood. For us, people who serve the truth, in the present day, for example, racism is not acceptable; The president of the United States' denigration of people because of their gender, or the color of their skin, is not acceptable; we can't act like that's normal; it is not normal because it is not the truth; the unlawful detention of asylum seekers, and the abuse of their human rights is unacceptable. I'm not speaking of partisanship. I'm speaking of morality. To be true to our purpose on this earth is to stand, body soul and spirit, in the truth... as long as we have breath... as long as we have life. The horizon toward which we travel is made visible in our daily practice of the faith. If we lose sight of the truth; if we don't act for it; then we lose our way. I fear that in this democracy of ours we are losing our way, because we are not attending to the Truth. Shall we, as people who follow Jesus, stand as a beacon for truth? Is that not the

first and foremost the purpose of the church? Isn't that what evangelism really means?

And the other point to be made here is that we do this work and hear this word in partnership, amid creative conversation, and collaborative action... There is energy and meaning and renewal in doing this work creatively together.

Amid the stress and strain of our work... and by work I don't mean the narrow definition of "church work"... I mean in our entire lives of sacrifice... our jobs, our avocations, even in our play... in our creativity and in our learning... learning too an act of sacrifice... amid the vital necessity of our work... in our work in every way our work is manifest... Let us dear Marthas and Marys, partners in the faith... let us raise our eyes always to the horizon, where sky meets earth... our eyes fixed on who we are called to be... who we really are as God sees us... and for whom we live our lives... Let our gaze be steadfast on the horizon of truth, the horizon of imaginative possibility, the very horizon of truth becoming known as we speak... and we shall find nourishment and rest and hope and, God willing, joy... In our artful lives of informed and imaginative sacrifice, let us keep our eyes on the one needful thing.... The Truth; that which binds heaven to earth... for in this life of love, the truth is the only thing we need.

