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Sunday 20 July 2025 – Pentecost 6

The service today has been prepared by
Mike Nielsen, one of our Lay Preachers

Welcome to our service this morning.

In working together on our shared mission, we commit to seven core values:

Togetherness, Humility, Curiosity, Love, Inclusiveness, Justice, Sustainability.

Togetherness: we cultivate genuine opportunities to gather together in worship and fellowship.

Community time during the service is a good opportunity to ask for prayers for yourself or others.

**After the service you are invited to share in morning tea,
either in the kitchen or on the deck.**

If you, or someone you know, would appreciate a visit from one of our **Pastoral Partners Team**, please speak to the service leader.

*You are invited to stand if you are able,
for the hymns and the offering prayer*

Welcome

Call to Worship

Come into God's presence.

All are welcome here.

Come, saints and sinners alike.

We are all God's children.

Faith has brought us here.

Grace will make us whole.

Come! Let us worship.

Source: B.J. Beu (The Abingdon Worship Annual 2023)

Opening Prayer

Gracious and loving God,
you meet us where we are.

We gather together from many walks of life,
but we are unified as one heart in the body of Christ.

In our time of worship,
open our ears to hear your voice;
open our eyes to see your glory;
open our minds to receive your word;
open our hearts to perceive your presence.
Amen.

Hymn: Celebration Song

(Lyrics: Michael Foster; Tune: Battle Hymn)

1. There's a song of Celebration that is ringing round the earth,
As humanity unites to sing of dignity and worth,
Out of poverty and anger God is bringing hope to birth:
Let all creation sing!

Chorus:

*Sing of hope and liberation; sing of justice and salvation,
Sing with holy indignation: Let all creation sing!*

2. It's a song of solidarity, of protest and of pain,
On behalf of all who suffer for another person's gain,
It's a call to faith and freedom that will never be in vain:
Let all creation sing!
3. It's a song that's sung in unison, but heard in harmony,
Many voices, many accents and a trillion ways to be;
And it liberates the wealthy as it sets the needy free:
Let all creation sing!
4. It's a song of humble penitence for all we haven't done,
It's a song of glad thanksgiving that the journey has begun;
It's the promise of a future when the world will be as one:
Let all creation sing!

Scripture Reading: Psalm 52

Our first scripture reading this morning is Psalm 52. This is a psalm of judgement on the wicked that transitions to one of praise and thanksgiving. The end of the psalm paints a picture of trust and flourishing in God's presence, using the metaphor of a green olive tree. These trees endure even the harshest conditions, their deep roots anchoring them to the soil. Similarly, as God's people we can remain steadfast, not because life is easy, but because our roots go deep into God's love, enabling us to thrive and stand firm in faith.

Prayer of Confession

For the times we fail to recognise your creativity and care,
O God, forgive us.

Open our eyes to your presence.

For the times when we try to laud it over others, O God, forgive us.

Open our eyes to your presence.

For the times when we misuse the creation in which you delight,
O God, forgive us.

Open our eyes to your presence.

Open our eyes to your majesty.

Open our eyes to your grace.

Open our eyes and so transform our lives that we would live and love
as Jesus lived and loved.

We pray in his name. Amen.

Words of Grace

God's Heart for the world is light and life.

God's Spirit in the world moves with transforming love.

Hear God's Good News for beloved people: In Christ, your sins are
forgiven.

Thanks be to God. Amen!

Hymn: God of Freedom, God of Justice

(Lyrics: Shirley Murray; Tune: Lauda Anima)

1. God of freedom, God of justice,
you whose love is strong as death,
you who saw the dark of prison,
you who knew the price of faith --
touch our world of sad oppression
with your Spirit's healing breath.
2. Rid the earth of torture's terror,
you whose hands were nailed to wood;
hear the cries of pain and protest,
you who shed the tears and blood --
move in us the power of pity
restless for the common good.

3. Make in us a captive conscience
quick to hear, to act, to plead;
make us truly sisters, brothers
of whatever race or creed --
teach us to be fully human,
open to each other's needs.

Gospel Reading: Luke 10:38-42

Reflection

Today's story takes place during Jesus' time travelling with his disciples to various villages, proclaiming the kingdom of God, healing the sick, and sharing the good news.

Earlier in the chapter Jesus had sent out 70 disciples to villages ahead of him, which Rosalie talked about in her service two weeks ago. We don't know whether some of those disciples came to the village where today's story is set, but we do know that Jesus ends up in the unnamed village, in the house of Martha, who lives with her sister Mary.

Martha's house. That's the first thing that jumps out from the text in this story. There is no mention of a husband, a father or any other male. This is Martha's house.

Often Mary and Martha in the gospel of Luke are assumed to be the same Mary and Martha mentioned in the gospel of John, but I'm not convinced that's the case. For one, in the gospel of John a brother, Lazarus, also lives with them (in which case, given the patriarchal society of the time, it'd likely be Lazarus' house, not Martha's). And, as I've shared with you before, recent research is indicating that there may not actually be a Martha in John's gospel, only a Mary (and not just any Mary, but Mary the Tower, or more commonly, Mary Magdalene).

But that's an aside. In our story today, we find Jesus at Martha's house. To quote Rev Dr Margaret Wesley:

She is the household leader. She is acting as a host in a culture where hospitality is vital to community life. There is value and honour in being a good host who provides hospitality to both friends and strangers.

And this isn't just Jesus popping over for lunch. He's on the road with his disciples, likely staying overnight, perhaps for several days. Martha's house has suddenly become very busy.

And in that busyness Martha's sister, Mary, is found sitting at the feet of Jesus. Mary is so often the focus when people talk about this story, however when you read our short passage today, it's clear that this is a conversation between two characters: Jesus and Martha. Martha is at the centre of the story. Mary's actions provoke the conversation, but it's the conversation between Martha and Jesus we need to focus on.

The story doesn't explicitly tell us about who Martha and Mary are and whether they have an existing relationship with Jesus, but some theologians, like Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington, think they could be two of Jesus' female disciples. Perhaps they could have been two of the 70 disciples sent out earlier in the chapter? We don't know; we're left to wonder.

Martha is said to be distracted by her many tasks – these tasks are often interpreted as the tasks of being a good host, which then leads to Martha being portrayed as being stuck in the kitchen getting everything ready while getting increasingly frustrated that her sister is not helping. But Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington debate that interpretation, saying:

the Greek literally reads, "distracted by much ministry". The word translated "tasks" is diakonia, the root of the English term "deacon."

When the term diakonia is used in the gospel of Luke and its sister book Acts it's in situations that do not concern people being busy in the kitchen, but people actively participating with others in leadership and ministry on behalf of the Christian community.

Martha welcoming Jesus and his disciples into her home is much more than her saying "stay for a while and have some food and drink"; welcoming them in and Luke's use of the term diakonia is a strong indication that Martha fully embraces the mission of Jesus. She is a disciple in all senses of the word.

But we can't forget about Mary. When the term diakonia is used elsewhere in the Bible there is a strong focus of partnership. This, alongside her sitting at the feet of Jesus, suggests that Martha and Mary are partners in their ministry.

They are doing this together. My reading in preparation for today suggests that these two women were working together to care for their fellow disciples, whatever tasks were befitting of them in their role that was similar to what would later be known as deacons. There could be some work in the kitchen, there could be some teaching and preaching. Whatever tasks it was, they were working together.

I love the focus on doing ministry and mission together – this is not a task we're called to carry out alone.

One of our church values is togetherness. Like it says on the front of today's service sheet: We cultivate genuine opportunities to gather together in worship and fellowship. I wonder if, based on the story of Martha and Mary, we should also add the word mission to that explanation: we cultivate genuine opportunities to gather together in worship, fellowship, and mission.

Getting Martha out of the kitchen and reframing her tasks through the lens of ministry and mission puts a completely different spin on the story. This becomes a story of two sisters who are disciples of Christ and together are fully onboard with his mission to share the good news.

Which brings us to the second part of today's story. Let's pick it back up at verse 40: But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things..."

With our new framing, Martha's distraction is not about the immediate tasks of hospitality and serving the now busy house full of guests, but instead, she is distracted by her many tasks in ministry and mission. I wonder if she is feeling the burden of her many tasks. I wonder if she is tired.

Margaret Wesley, who I quoted earlier, says we might consider translating verses 40 and 41 more like this:

⁴⁰ But Martha was overwhelmed by many ministry responsibilities, so she came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the ministry by myself? Tell her to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are going to so much trouble and you have so many responsibilities to worry about!"

Martha is tired, overwhelmed. That's certainly a feeling and situation I can relate to at times; perhaps you can too?

Martha and Mary have been actively working together in their ministry, however in this moment we see Mary taking a break and sitting at the feet of Jesus, while Martha, exhausted and overwhelmed, is pleading with Jesus to get Mary to continue to help her.

Chris Green says that Martha is grieved with Jesus for seemingly not caring for her (linking to the story of the disciples in the boat during storm: do you not care that we're drowning?).

She's saying, Jesus, don't you get it? Mary shouldn't be sitting down there with you – she needs to get back to helping me with our ministry. I'm tired, I'm weary, I need help. I can't do this by myself.

Just like Martha, there are so many reasons for us to feel tired and overwhelmed. Not just in our ministry, but with everyday life, not to mention what is happening in the world around us. Perhaps you're physically exhausted, perhaps you're emotionally exhausted, perhaps you're spiritually exhausted.

We can glimpse Martha's tiredness and overwhelm in her own words: "by myself". Those two words, so real, so human, sit at the heart of this passage. By myself. She feels alone, unsupported, with Mary now sitting at Jesus' feet.

All she wants is for Jesus to acknowledge her, to see her tiredness, and to get Mary to start helping her out again. It's supposed to be a partnership; we're supposed to be doing this together.

Instead, Jesus turns to her and says Mary has chosen the better part. I can imagine Martha thinking: Excuse me, Jesus? She should be working alongside me in this ministry, and now she's sitting at your feet. I'm left to do everything and I'm tired. This doesn't feel like good news.

But we need to consider how Jesus begins his sentence. He doesn't just come out and say: "Mary's doing the right thing". He begins with "Martha, Martha".

I love how theologian Jeff Chu talks about this. He says:

Some of us might hear [Martha, Martha] unfairly as a reprimand or correction. When it might instead ring more mercifully with the intimacy and gentleness of a beloved brother: Martha, Martha.

Perhaps her name is spoken with the insider knowledge of the one who knows her and made her, even better than she knows herself.

Perhaps her name is said with the tenderness and kindness of one who has also done so much without recognition and taken on a burden that nobody else could understand? Perhaps her name is voiced with the conviction of one whose very nature was loving solidarity.

Martha, Martha, he says. Perhaps in those two words, in those two specific and gently targeted words, he is saying, slow down, be still, it's okay, I see you, I know you, and I love you. And I wonder whether that's something many of us could afford to listen to right now. That is undoubtedly good news.

These two sisters have been doing ministry, been doing mission, together. Now Mary appears to have the one thing that Martha needs at this moment to restore her, to take away her tiredness and her overwhelm: Mary is at Jesus' feet listening to his teaching.

And in those two words, "Martha, Martha", perhaps Jesus is aiming to bring them back into partnership. Slow down, be still, it's okay, I see you, I know you, and I love you. Take time, rest, join your sister Mary and sit at my feet. Then together you can be reinvigorated and continue your ministry and mission.

I wonder if that's something we need to be reminded of here at our church. I know there are a lot of us in our congregation that are tired. We're like Martha. We've been doing ministry and mission for a long time together and we are feeling tired, perhaps even overwhelmed.

If that's your situation, I hope that through today's story you can hear Jesus' words, Martha, Martha, and substitute your own name there: Martha, Martha. Slow down, be still, it's okay, I see you, I know you, and I love you.

Take time, rest at my feet, and, like the green olive tree from our earlier psalm, sink your roots deep into the source of all love, Jesus, our sustainer and restorer.

Amen.

Hymn: Come and Find the Quiet Centre

(Lyrics: Shirley Murray; Tune: Nettleton)

1. Come and find the quiet centre
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the frame where we are freed:
clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes, that we can see
all the things that really matter,
be at peace, and simply be.
2. Silence is a friend who claims us,
cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us,
knows our being, touches base,
making space within our thinking,
lifting shades to show the sun,
raising courage when we're shrinking,
finding scope for faith begun.
3. In the Spirit let us travel,
open to each other's pain,
let our loves and fears unravel,
celebrate the space we gain:
there's a place for deepest dreaming,
there's a time for heart to care,
in the Spirit's lively scheming
there is always room to spare!

Offering Prayer

These offerings belong to you, O Lord,
for you are the source of every blessing and joy.

Use these gifts to build your realm.
Send them into the world to heal the sick,
feed the hungry, and reconcile us to one another.

By our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service,
make your church a true instrument of peace.

Amen.

Community Time – Celebration, Notices, Concerns for Prayer

Prayers of the People

As one heart is lifted

May we share its celebration

As one heart is burdened

May we share the pain it knows.

For ourselves, for those named or remembered,
and in solidarity with those
who have not the freedom to express
their concern or celebration
for fear of discrimination or condemnation.

May we find in this day
an awareness of the freedom we are given
to know life unshackled from fear,
and embrace the possibilities of the present,
with every breath we take.

Adapted from: Greta Vosper

Hymn: Dare to Live the Dream God Gives You

(Protest of Praise; Tune: Hyfrydol)

1. Dare to live the dream God
gives you,
Seek out paths as yet unknown,
For the Spirit leads you onward,
And you never walk alone.

Refrain:

*Go in courage, walking humbly,
Bearing love none can destroy.
Doing justice, loving mercy,
Go with God, and go in joy.*

2. When the dread of doubt
assails you,
And the road remains unclear,
Yet our faithful God will guide
you

Through the doubt and dread
of fear.

3. Journey on with true
companions,
Joining hands and sharing bread,
For we share a common journey
And in friendship we are fed.

4. Dare to live the dream God gives
us,
Brave the path, and face the
fear,
For the Spirit will unite us;
Christ himself is always near.

Benediction

Though we may leave God's house,
we do not leave God's presence.
Like green olive trees in the house of God,
we will plant our roots in the soil of holy love.
Heeding the joy of God's call in our lives,
we go to share God's love for all.

Source: B.J. Beu (The Abingdon Worship Annual 2025)

Closing karakia:

Kia tau ki a tātou katoa

Te atawhai o tō tātou Ariki, a Ihu
Karaiti

Me te aroha o te Atua

Me te whiwhingatahitanga

Ki te wairua tapu

Ake, ake, ake

Amine

Translation

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus
Christ,*

and the love of God,

*and the fellowship of the Holy
Spirit be with you all*

Forever and ever

Amen