

*A sermon given on Sunday, July 18, 2010
at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Cleveland Heights, Ohio
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Luke 10:38-42*

“Do Be Do Be Do”

Recently I have been listening to the music that I brought back from South Africa when I visited there 2 years ago. I don't know whether it is because of the World Cup coverage, or that I was there about this time of year, but often my car CD player is blasting hits from Freshly Ground, one of the more popular bands. They have a chart-topping song, which sings about the day when politicians will be honest, and people will offer love to each other. It is called, “Doo Be Doo.” Perhaps not the most original title, but a catchy song, nonetheless. Its lyrics are somewhat reminiscent of John Lennon's song Imagine, or Isaiah's vision of the lion lying down with the lamb. It talks about wanting to be there in line when all this happens. And, you guessed it, the refrain goes, *Doo be doo be doo be doo by-a!* Many other songs through the ages have crooned do-be-do or something similar. But what strikes me about Freshly Ground's version is the wonderful alternation between painting this hopeful vision of peace and harmony, and then singing a little nonsensical diddy, almost to invite you to think less concretely and more abstractly, to invite you into dreaming.

I think this is a piece of what is so important in today's short Gospel story. There are many ways to look at the Martha and Mary dilemma. One is to decide that Jesus was telling Martha that housework is not important. That doesn't take us very far, in my mind. Some claim that this is a story of women's liberation, for Jesus condones Mary's behavior which would be considered appropriate in that society only if she were male. There may be an argument to be made here. Jesus, especially as portrayed in Luke, is known for including the outcasts, and for challenging the reigning hierarchy of his day. Given the recent proclamations from the Catholic Church about the role of women, this sure has some appeal! Another view is to see Martha as the do-er and Mary as the be-er, the one who sits at Jesus' feet and thinks higher thoughts. What happens there is that the two sides become polarized and we are forced to defend one against the other. Countless sermons have been preached that chastise Martha and exhort us all to be more like Mary. Some interpretations try to soften it a little. Our curriculum has a preschool story which has Jesus saying to Martha, *“Come and join us, Martha. Don't worry about the kitchen. We can all work together in there afterwards.”* Well, maybe Jesus promised to help in the kitchen after the theological discourse, and maybe he didn't. But maybe this interpretation points us in the right direction, even though at first glance, it seems to soften Jesus' words, which is rarely the proposed way to read scripture.

I don't think Jesus was proclaiming that housework was not important, or that we should never do anything to be hospitable, friendly, helpful, etc. But I believe the power of the doing and the being is in the why and the how. Not the mechanics-how but the attitude-how. Their power is in our motivation for doing or for being at any one moment, and our attitude as we act or sit. How we approach a task or an interaction (whether human or divine) says a lot about what we truly value and helps to determine the result of such sitting or action.

Often when we take two choices and turn them into polar opposites, we put competition where there doesn't need to be any. We do not really need to choose sitting at Jesus' feet to the

exclusion of helping in the kitchen. This dualistic way of thinking leads us to believe that these are two mutually exclusive options – that we cannot choose both.

We do not need to state that because spiritual things are not necessarily physical, therefore all physical things are evil. We do not need to choose one over the other, and reject completely the one not chosen. Instead we are invited to learn the dance between the two. Sometimes they can co-mingle simultaneously, and sometimes we need to alternate between the two. Sometimes there are more than two choices! I believe that the art of blending multiple choices rather than polarizing them helps those those choices serve us better, and complement each other.

So if I can see the connection between physical and spiritual, then a practice like yoga or the celebration of the Eucharist can be more powerful. I can learn how to use movement as prayer, to integrate the two and feel more whole. I can live more fully into the classic definition of a sacrament: an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. The physical can point to the spiritual. If I can learn how to move between doing and being, then perhaps the doing can inform the being and the being can bring focus and inspiration to the doing. To do is to be in a different way, to be is to do differently.

Jesus often criticized the attitude with which actions were performed. He wanted people to open their hearts, to see things in new ways, to stop just going through the motions. He wanted them to remember why they had been given the Law, and to get back to sharing God's love. So when we run around merely doing all our many and various tasks, when we fret about who is doing more work and who is getting away with something, when we talk about how busy and stressed out we are, but make no changes to our patterns, then we have lost the why of the doing. The why is love. It is always love. And so perhaps "choosing the better part" means slowing down enough to listen – to our hearts, to those around us, to God. Maybe in making space and time to be with God, we will be able to get in touch again with the reason for our doing. Not one over the other, but a dance between the two. And then we can do for others in love. And we can be with God. And we can dream dreams and see visions. We can have the space we need to live God's way. Maybe the crooners over the decades got it right: Do Be Do Be Do Be Do in Love. Amen.