

We have been convinced that all we need to be content is to be busy – active living now means more than just a twenty minute work-out every other day.

The focus of these activities and the resting place for all this information is ourselves; In order to justify ourselves – to claim ‘fulfillment’ – we are relentless in our pursuit of things to do, people to see, places to go.

We carry with us (or have in our homes) devices that give us access to events on the other side of the world – we can watch wars as they start; we are transported to the scene of the crime, to the sight of many a disaster, as they unfold – and after an initial feeling of sympathy, we move on; what we really want to know is: “how does this matter to ME?”

Our interaction with the world is necessary, and important; it is part of our call as followers of Jesus to be involved in the world around us – but we are in danger of confusing “informed” with “involved”. Information and activities fill our lives, but we are mostly untouched by these things.

I am speaking as if this was a new problem – it is not. We have always held within us the tendency to distraction – to be drawn away from truth by the facts of our daily lives. We have this morning heard just two examples (among many) from the witness of Scripture, that suggest this is an ancient dilemma.

In a household known to Jesus, there were two sisters. Both steeped in the habits and traditions of their culture, and their religion. A culture that values hospitality and honour very highly – and so, visitors must be treated in a certain way. Martha has set herself to the task with a vengeance.

Their religion values hospitality too – but also recognizes that there are times to be busy and times to be reverently still. Mary chooses the latter.

There is company coming – important company. There’s food to prepare, rituals to be observed – hospitality to be offered – more than enough work for two sisters...and Mary has set herself at Jesus’ feet, oblivious to the whirl of the world (and her sister) around her.

Mary gets credit for doing NOTHING, and our protestant minds have a hard time with that. Martha objects – we object, secretly – sure, it's Jesus, and all, but lend a hand, for heaven's sake!

And then Jesus increases our anxiety (and Martha's) by saying that there is really only one thing – and that Mary has found it, and it cannot be taken from her.

Perhaps the one, necessary thing – in a world of too many choices – is the decision to set time aside for holy moments. When the holy comes to call, it would be wise to pay attention. To be still and know, as the Psalmist says – but what if God is not in any of the usual places? How do you know when you are in the presence of the most high?

Sometimes a man comes to your home, or three strangers appear at your tent, and without warning, it is THE LORD.

Jesus brought to this house a reputation as a teacher, healer and man of God. There must have been some anticipation as he made his way up the road, and through the yard. Martha wanted to be ready – visitors (then, as now) are a big deal, and it's better if everything is ready... and Mary is no help at all.

Yet it is Mary who gets the nod from Jesus, as the one who has her priorities straight. There is one thing, Jesus says. One thing, in which all other things find completion. One thing which truly satisfies.

The greatest of mysteries meets us when strangers call at the wrong time (as in Abraham's story) or when the demands of the day have defeated us and we sit still and wonder - and suddenly, the ordinary is revealed as divine; we discover the nearness of God.

It is not always obvious – this is what this morning's lessons tell us - the divine presence is not always accompanied by lights and angels. God's presence is not always obvious, even in worship!

The hymns are too old (or not old enough to have become favourites.). The Scriptures are confusing – the message is too long...

We come expecting something – our demand for information is insatiable - our lifelong curiosity is not yet exhausted – but we are exhausted. Our pursuit of information – our quest for new activity – has worn us out, and made it difficult to be still.

Our hunger for instant satisfaction has made us impatient where the Almighty is concerned we are disappointed with God, truth be told – and discouraged by our failure to find the one thing that we really need – the only thing our information culture can't provide and then, when we have all but given up, God finds us.

God is not in the anticipation, God is in the visit.

God is not in the preparations, God is in the company.

God is not in the ritual, the music, the sermons and prayers,

God is in the midst of us, waiting to be noticed, honoured, thanked, or heard...

If only we would stop and notice.

The secret – the one necessary thing –is not more activity or more information. The secret does not rest in our ability to find, but in our willingness to wait.

In that, we have access to the greatest gift of all –we find ourselves face to face with God.