

CREATED GAY

Sermon title: Ministry When Life Happens

SCRIPTURES FOR WEEK: Amos 8:1-12, Psalm 52, Colossians 1:15–28, Luke 10:38–42

The sermon starts just below the section in blue.

CALL TO WORSHIP Based on Amos 8:1-12

One: Like the prophet Amos, we see a basket of fruit. The basket of fruit is from our orchards of inequality. The fruit looks like it is rotten.

All: **We inventory the rotten fruit:**

- **Neglecting spirituality.**
- **Overcharging people.**
- **Cheating people.**
- **Trampling on the impoverished.**

One: And we hear God say:

All: **"I will never forget."**

One: God says, "I will send a famine. People will be hungry and thirsty, but not for bread and water. They will thirst for the things of God."

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Ministry When Life Happens

by Gary Simpson

Luke 10:38-42 (KJV) Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one

thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet, which was the place where disciples typically sat.¹ Contributors to the *ESV Study Bible* note that Jesus, unlike some of His contemporaries, "encouraged women to study the Scriptures."² This text helps point to equality in access to the Word and equality in access to God. In my opinion, equal access to the Word, equal access to discipleship and equal access to God supports the position that women are entitled to equal access to opportunities for service in communities of faith.

When Martha asks Jesus to instruct Mary to help her, the request carries with it a meaning that we might not see in English. Martha is wanting Mary to both help and to take a "real interest" in being a good host.³

Over the years, hospitality has changed and is not quite as important in church circles as it used to be. When I was a kid, the church denomination my family attended had a reputation for being fairly hospitable. After church, visitors were usually invited to someone's home for lunch. I remember a person telling how terribly unfriendly a church was. The proof positive that the church was bad was that nobody invited the person home for lunch. In city churches, we tend to use coffee shops and cafes, instead of inviting people to our homes.

Hospitality was important in the ancient Middle East. Exodus 22:21 (GNB) "Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner; remember that you were foreigners in Egypt." To give you an idea of how important hospitality was to the ancients, there are theologians who believe that the sin of Sodom, a city that the Biblical narrative says was destroyed by fire because of its sins, was lack of hospitality. Hospitality was a "social requirement" for Jesus' contemporaries.⁴

Jesus, the popular rabbi, visits Martha's home. For Martha, Jesus' visit was probably a real honor. And Martha's home might have been packed with guests.⁵ Being a good host was Martha's ministry for Jesus. Every social custom of being a good host needed to be followed. To do any less than all that was socially expected, was just wrong. I suspect Martha was pulling out all of the stops to make sure everything was perfect and Mary was just sitting and listening to Jesus. So Martha was ticked enough to ask Jesus to tell Mary to help her. Jesus' response is interesting. He gives a rebuke to Martha when He says, "[Mary hath chosen that good part.](#)" This might indicate that Jesus believes Mary chose the good dish to eat, the spiritual dish.⁶

¹ Jon L. Dybdahl, et. al., eds. *Andrews Study Bible*. (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews Univ. Press, 2010), 1349, Lane T. Dennis, et. al., eds. *ESV Study Bible*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2011), 1977, and *Christian Community Bible*. (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Pub., 1999), N.T., 155.

² Dennis, et. al., 1977.

³ Ann Nyland. *Study New Testament for Lesbians, Gays, Bi, and Transgender*. (Australia: Smith and Sterling Pub., 2007), 116.

⁴ Bruce B. Barton, et. al., eds. *Life Application Study Bible*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Pub., 2004), 1707.

⁵ Charles M. Laymon, ed. *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 689.

⁶ Laymon, ed., 689.

Churches tend to be divided between Marthas and Marys. We have the Marthas, those who focus on doing ministry, and we have the Marys, those who focus on learning and on worship. And I am not sure that Marthas appreciate Marys very much, but both groups are needed in church. Without church Marthas, not much would get done. Without Marys, without those who focus on worship and meditation, there would be no need for church. I fear that I am in the camp of those who are perpetual motion machines, constantly looking for ways to serve. For those of us who on a perpetual ministry motion machine, Neale Walsch, the author of the intriguing book *What God Wants*, gives us cause to pause from the rat race, cause to sit down and smell the flowers and cause to reflect when he postulates, “Perhaps, ‘God’ does not want something from humans, but exists only to give something to humans.”⁷ There are times when serving God, as valuable as that is, is void of devotion to God⁸ and our feverish service “leaves us empty.”⁹

Vernon McGee, the popular Bible commentator, notes that if you are frustrated, confused and that you do not know which direction to go, you should, like Mary, sit down at Jesus feet. After being at Jesus feet, you will find that you can do a better job with the things that you need to do.¹⁰ Recently, I was talking to a person who emphasized the need for meditation. The person said that meditation is necessary for counsellors or it will look like the counsellor is the one who needs counselling. Prayer, when not rushed, can be a form of meditation. Combining prayer and silent time, silent meditation allows us to focus on God and to “slip into” God’s will.¹¹

My ministry the past few weeks was interrupted, interrupted too many times. At Pride, at our Pride Church Service, my ministry was interrupted by news of the shooting deaths of 49 people in a gay club in Orlando, Florida. Since then, my ministry was interrupted by the news of the shooting of two Black men, Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, and by the shooting deaths of five police officers in Dallas, Texas, Michael Smith, Lorne Ahrens, Michael Krol, Patrick Zamarripa and Brent Thompson, who were protecting a Black Lives Movement protest.¹² I wanted my life to continue as planned, doing all of the socially acceptable and expected things in my life and my ministry. But stuff got in the way. My scheduled activities were interrupted by:

- A candlelight vigil for the 49 people in Orlando who were killed by a murderer who appears to have been partially motivated by religious hate.
- Lobbying for a memorial service for the victims of the Orlando, Florida shooting.
- Writing a response to the shooting titled ““Blood Cries to God!”
- Attending a vigil for Philando Castile and Alton Sterling.
- News of the deadly terrorist attack in Nice, France.

⁷ Neale Donald Walsch. *What God Wants: A Compelling Answer to Humanity’s Biggest Question*. (New York: Atria Books, 2005), 95.

⁸ Bruce Barton, et. al., eds. *Life Application Study Bible*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Pub., 2004), 1709.

⁹ *Christian Community Bible*, N.T., 155.

¹⁰ J. Vernon McGee. *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*. (Pasadena, California: Thru the Bible Radio, 1989), ebook.

¹¹ *Christian Community Bible*, N.T., 155.

¹² "2016 Shooting of Dallas Police Officers. *Wikipedia*. 11 July 2016, 11 July 2016. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_shooting_of_Dallas_police_officers>.

Stopping to honor the lives of people who died is both an act of service and an act of worship, an act that often involves reflection, meditation, and, at times, painful and challenging soul searching.

Forty-nine people murdered in a gay club, two Black men shot by the police, where there are concerns the shootings are not justified, and five police killed. I tried to make sense of the fear, of the hate and nothing made sense, nothing worked. I was left stunned by the loss of life, by the hate, by the homophobia and by the racial tension that captured the attention of people across the North American continent, including Edmonton, where there was a Black Lives Matter vigil. And I remain a little uncertain about what I can do to reduce the fear and the anger.

We saw powerful glimpses of love in the emergency created by the senseless shootings. Brenda McCool, a mother of eleven, was at Pulse, an Orlando gay club, dancing with her son before the shooter was killing people. News reports indicate that she saw the gunman turn toward her son, Isaiah Henderson, and she got in front of her son to protect him. She gave her life protecting her son.¹³ News reports give us the sense that White police officers in Dallas tried to protect Black Lives Matter Protesters when the sniper started shooting.¹⁴ The stories of courageous love show the power of love. And we long for the time when love will triumph over hate.

When Jesus walked the earth, the Roman Empire had massive strength. Romans were the privileged and the Jews living in Palestine and scattered throughout the Roman Empire were one of the underprivileged groups in the Empire. To Jesus' Jewish contemporaries, saying all lives matter might have been understood to mean only Roman lives matter. Jesus' ministry showed that He believed all lives matter, but He did so in a way that affirmed the worth of members of each minority and oppressed group.

- Jesus' actions said, "Jewish lives matter," as He preached for largely Jewish groups and healed Jewish people.
- Christ's actions said, "Slaves lives matter when He healed the Centurion's servant."¹⁵
- His actions said, "Children's lives matter," as He said, "Let the children come to me."¹⁶
- Jesus' actions said, "Women's lives matter," as He healed the woman who was bleeding for twelve years.¹⁷
- Christ's actions said, "Leper's lives matter," as He healed lepers.¹⁸
- His actions said, "Handicapped lives matter," as He healed the man with the withered hand.¹⁹
- His actions said, "Samaritan lives matter," as He talked to the Samaritan woman.
- Jesus' actions said, "Roman soldiers lives matter," as He healed the Centurion's servant.

¹³ "Mom of 11 Killed in Orlando Massacre Protecting Son Laid to Rest." CBS News. 21 June 2016, 11 July 2016. <<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/brenda-mccool-mom-11-orlando-massacre-funeral/>>.

¹⁴ Elahe Izadi. "How Police Officers Protected Black Lives Matter Protesters during Dallas Shooting." *Washington Post*. 8 July 2016, 13 July 2016. <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2016/07/08/the-acts-of-heroism-during-a-deadly-night-in-dallas/>>.

¹⁵ Matthew Chapter 8.

¹⁶ Mark 10:13-15, GNB.

¹⁷ Mark Chapter 5.

¹⁸ Mark Chapter 1.

¹⁹ Mark Chapter 3.

After an earthly ministry where Jesus' actions showed that the lives of each minority mattered, people could understand that He was qualified to say "All lives matter," when He said, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me."²⁰

If someone asks you, "Do you believe Black lives matter or all lives matter? Which side are you on?" you can respond, "As a person who likes to follow Jesus of Nazareth, I stand on the side of love." Possibly, much better than that we can respond in actions that show that we stand on the side of love.



PRAYERS OF RESPONSE TO LUKE 10:38-42

All: **God of peace and calm, we thank you for:**

- **Our church's many Marys and Marthas.**
- **For those who labour on our behalf, often unnoticed and unappreciated.**
- **For those who worship and connect to You without fanfare.**

God, we thank you for:

- **For those who we do not understand, because of their**
 - **World view.**
 - **Sexual orientation or gender.**
 - **Culture and language.**
 - **Socio-economic status.**
 - **Race, tribe, ethnicity.**
 - **Ability or disability.**
 - **Occupation.**
 - **Age.**
 - **Privilege or lack of privilege.**

Creator, we thank you for:

- **Those who see good and potential when many in society feel overwhelmed.**

God, in your name, we dare to hope:

- **For justice for our Indigenous, Black and Latino peoples.**
- **For religious understanding and sectarian peace.**
- **No child will go hungry.**

Creator, we dare to hope:

- **Students will not be bullied out of school.**
- **That homophobia and transphobia end.**

²⁰ John 12:32, GNB.

- **For the safety of our police, our soldiers and our emergency responders.**
- **To challenge resentment and stereotypes.**

Make us a channel of Your love, Your peace and Your courage, so that Your peace is a cooling wind that disperses stress, oppression and injustice.

Amen.