

I will acknowledge that I'm probably wrong, and New Testament scholars will likely prove it to be the case. I just have this wonderful fantasy that the writer of the gospel according to Luke was a woman.

Why? Luke's gospel is woman-friendly. Jesus meets his theological match with a woman in Luke. Healing women are some of the best stories in this gospel. And, then there's today's selection. From my high school years to today, life balance is the biggest challenge I have.

Men have the same challenges, of course. This isn't a gender issue. It's just that the message really resonates for me as a third generation, work-outside-the-home-my-whole-life woman. Jesus' message for me is clear in the gospel message: Life balance requires that you must choose and that means something must lose.

What do we make of this frustrating and illuminating directive of Jesus of Nazareth?

Let me stress that Martha's frustration is real. There are societal expectations of her and her sister and she's being let down.

Let me stress also that Mary's choice is legitimate. Jesus actually praises Mary for her choice and chides Martha for hers. I dare say that the Marys in the congregation are now feeling smug and the Marthas are gritting their teeth!

I think that Jesus is making it clear that none of us can have it all. We just can't. I don't care what Madison Avenue or Gloria Steinem says. Something's gotta give. We must decide where that 'give' happens.

Jesus knows full well that Mary sitting at his feet, listening to him teach, created a buzz. Mary left Martha with the kitchen duty. She's not happy. In addition, Mary just broke the gender barrier here. Jesus asks his male followers to give a little and let a woman join the ranks of disciples. They do, but my guess is that some of them aren't happy.

Then there's poor Martha. She's stuck with the serving duties that women of that era. Her upsettedness continues to modern day. I will say that my dear hubby is very good about helping with clean up during big entertaining bashes at our home. However, my experience throughout my life has not been so accommodating.

I don't think I ever saw my grandfathers do a dish in their entire lives. I don't think my dad started helping until he was well past retirement. Yet, even today, it seems that it's always the "girls" who have their hands in dishwater after Thanksgiving Dinner. What gives?

What does Jesus do in response? He tells Martha to leave the dishes and come and sit down with her sister!

Egad. Now the guys must move over just a little bit more.

Egad-er. Who's going to do the serving?

Egad-est. Who's going to clean up!!

(I'm telling you, Luke was a woman! As an aside – my gospel fantasy includes a statement from Jesus directing two of the guys to go clean up the kitchen, which, of course, was redacted when the canon was put together. But, hey, it's a fantasy! Let me dream!)

Jesus requests balance. Jesus requests that we all take time to sit at his feet, listen to his teachings, love him. Jesus is saying that “Yes, things need to get done, but a relationship with me is worth your time.”

When Jesus says this, other things change priority. Food needs to be served and the dishes done. But, it’s not just one person’s responsibility. The word of God speaks and must be listened to by everyone. Therefore, we must make space and time available for all to participate. Jesus is challenging gender roles and expectations.

The Episcopal Church, in the macro view, has done a pretty good job at following this example of Jesus. The sacraments of marriage and ordination have finally caught up with the sacrament of baptism. We recognize and bless the life-long relationships of two people regardless of gender identity. We ask the Holy Spirit to descend to make people deacons, priests, and bishops regardless of gender identity. This has all happened in the 42 years of adult membership in this part of God’s vineyard.

On a micro-level, there are still challenges.

Inviting Martha to sit at his feet meant that she had to give up control over what she believed to be her 'domain'. She had to choose not only to let things sit, but perhaps also to let someone else take care of them. Jesus calls us to 'move over' that way too. Give up some of the things you're afraid won't get done if you don't do them.

Guess what! They might not get done. Or, they might not get done the way you want them to get done.

Guess what! You may be asked to mentor a new person in a new capacity allowing for less angst on all sides.

Guess what! Things get done! And, because you've allowed the space for someone else to move in, you may have invited someone to enter a new relationship with you, with your family, and with Jesus.

That's a lesson we need to learn in church as well as at home and at work.

So, the choice we are always discerning is "what gives? and when?"

Is today the day Jesus is asking you to sit down with him? Is today the day you lose a little time doing quotidian tasks?

Is today the day you're asked to give something up in order that someone might pick it up? Is today the day you give up control of something?

Is today the day you pick something up so that someone can sit down? Is today the day you acknowledge you may have to do something that makes you uncomfortable?

Whatever discernment today might bring for you, Jesus loves you. Jesus loves you just like he loved Mary and Martha.

That's not a fantasy.