

McCabe United Methodist Church

Lent, 2016: "Cross My Heart, Cont'd" (w/ The 5 Love Languages)

The Gift of Undivided Attention: "Quality Time"

Sermon on Luke 10:38-42, theme Scripture: Galatians 5:13-18, 22-25

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I have to tell you; few things get a room full of church women more riled-up than asking them to reflect deeply on the story of Jesus with Mary and Martha. So, for those of you already feeling uncomfortable after that story was read a few moments ago, bear with me 'cuz here it is again:

"[Jesus] and his disciples were traveling along and came to a village. When they got there, a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat down in front of the Lord and was listening to what he said.

"Martha was worried about all that had to be done. Finally, she went to Jesus and said, 'Lord, doesn't it bother you that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me!'

"[Jesus] answered, 'Martha, Martha! You are worried and upset about so many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen what is best, and it will not be taken away from her.'"

Last fall, I led a workshop on hospitality at a United Methodist Women's event here in town. There were about 40 women in attendance and, during the workshop, we read through this story, did some private journaling about it, had small group conversations, and then we discussed it as a large group.

When I announced that we'd be exploring the story of Jesus with Mary and Martha, the grumbling began almost instantaneously. One woman even exclaimed, "I hate this story!" And when she said that, sympathetic laughter began to percolate throughout the room.

But I want to put Jesus, Mary, and Martha on hold for a moment – we'll get back to them soon enough. For now, a bit about our current sermon series and why this particular story was chosen for this particular day...

A week-and-a-half ago, on Ash Wednesday, we officially entered the season of Lent. The season of Lent is a 6-week journey with Jesus toward the cross of Good Friday and the empty tomb of Easter Sunday.

This holy season is a time of reflection on the amazing, sacrificial love God showed through Jesus' death on the cross. And, here at McCabe, as we journey through Lent, we're revisiting our worship theme from the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

During Advent and Christmas here at McCabe, our worship theme was "Cross My Heart."

See, the first Christmas 2,000 years ago, God fulfilled a *promise* made to the people that a Messiah would come to bring mercy and salvation to the world. Thinking about *promises*, the phrase "cross my heart" came to mind – a phrase generations of children have used as the sign of a promise: "Cross my heart, hope to die..."

The first Christmas, when Jesus was born into this world, God's own Son began walking around among us...and it's been said that having a child is like having your heart walking around outside your body – a piece of *you*, vulnerable to all the good and all the bad this world can bring.

That first Christmas, God said to the world, "Here is my Son – here is my very heart – take him and do with him what you will."

During Advent and Christmas, we acknowledge that God's promised Messiah – God's Son, God's very heart – began as a baby born in a manger. Now, during Lent, we acknowledge our human sin led that baby born in the manger to become the grown-up Savior dying on the cross.

The promise of Advent and Christmas is a promise of supreme love from God's own heart. As we now journey through *Lent*, toward the cross of Good Friday, it's so fitting for us to continue the "Cross My Heart" theme.

But we're continuing it through a particular lens: the lens of *The 5 Love Languages*. Through this lens, we're exploring five passages of Scripture where God's promised Messiah demonstrated love in very particular ways – *five* particular ways...five ways we humans are challenged to *receive* and to *share* God's amazing love.

Because – as I said last week, and as I'll continue to say throughout the season of Lent – the best way we can respond to God's great love for us is by sharing that love *well* in the world.

The 5 Love Languages were developed as a concept by Christian counselor Gary Chapman.

Consider the languages we speak and hear in order to communicate with one another: English, Spanish, German, sign language, etc. If someone communicates with us in a language we do not speak, it's very difficult for us to understand them...and vice versa. According to Gary Chapman, the same principle applies when it comes to communicating *love* in any relationship.

While there are thousands of languages spoken throughout the world, Dr. Chapman believes there are only *five* primary “languages” through which each of us communicates love.

Those five “love languages” are as follows: *Words of Affirmation. Quality Time. Physical Touch. Gifts. and Acts of Service.*

Whether we realize it or not, each of us receives and offers love in these five ways – and one or two of them tend to be the ways in which we receive and offer love *best* and most *naturally*.

Again the five “love languages” are: *Words of Affirmation ...Quality Time...Physical Touch... Gifts...and Acts of Service.* It's worth noting that these are love languages with which we communicate in *all* of our relationships: romantic, friendship, familial, collegial, you name it. No matter the relationship, love will somehow be communicated in these five ways.

The challenge lies in knowing how *best* to communicate love with those around us. Because, just like spoken languages, if someone communicates love to us in a “love language” that is not one of our primary love languages, we may not understand it as love...and vice versa.

If we intend to communicate love, affection, and care to someone in our life, we should want to communicate that love in the best way possible. And sometimes that will mean learning to “speak” a love language that may not be one of our own top love languages.

Last week we considered Words of Affirmation. Those of us for whom Words of Affirmation is a top love language, well, we *need* to hear you say, or to see you write, how much you appreciate our work or our talents or our simple presence with you. Kind, supportive, affirming words *feel* like love to those for whom Words of Affirmation is a top love language.

The same principle holds true no matter the love language in question: if one of your top love languages is Quality Time – today's particular love language – what you crave most is the undivided attention of others. And, in this day and age of constant distractions, Quality Time seems to be an increasingly rare gift.

I was a waitress for a couple of years in college and, during that time, cell phones began their ascent to cultural dominance.

Every once in a while a table full of 20-somethings would be in my section and, along with their food and drinks, several phones would be on the table. I remember inwardly rolling my eyes and thinking,

“Seriously? These people can't have a meal out together without hoping someone – who isn't with them here – will call them? Can't they just focus on the people they're actually with???”

Fast forward 10 years and I'm one of the ones with the mobile phone attached to my person, afraid to go too far without it for fear I might miss a call or a text or a Facebook notification. But divided attention isn't just about mobile phones.

People in every time and place have found ways of dividing their attention away from those they are actually with; “divided attention” is not a new thing by any means. You don't need a mobile phone, a tablet, a video game player, a TV, or a computer in order to divide your attention away from other people.

But, these days, it's so easy for those devices to distract us and to divide our attention; very often, we allow ourselves to focus on the people on the other end of the device, rather than to give our *undivided* attention to those who are in the same room with us.

Yes, sometimes things come up...a phone call we have to take, a text or email requiring our quick response. Occasionally, we need to divide our attention away from those we are with. But I firmly believe those occasions are actually quite limited. However, I say that, and, in the same breath, I must admit how frequently I, too, am guilty of this.

And, as it happens, just this weekend I managed to *almost* create the perfect *negative* illustration of this in my own life – within the context of my very new marriage. So listen now as I tell you a cautionary tale about how easily one can forget the importance of the love language “Quality Time”...

Every week, I reserve the daytime on Friday – or as much of the daytime as possible on Friday – for sermon writing. This week was no exception.

My husband, Derrick, was working during the day this Friday, so it was a good combination. With no other plans on our calendars, we had decided to spend a nice, quiet evening together at home Friday night after what surely would have been a full day of work for both of us.

Well...as happens on occasion, my sermon-writing day got a little crowded with other things – some of which were work-related, some of which were not. But I knew I had much of the day Saturday to finish my writing if I didn't get most of it done during the day on Friday.

Derrick came home from work around 6:00, we made dinner, and, as we were talking about how we'd like to spend the evening, I began to feel a little antsy about my sermon. (You know, the sermon I didn't finish writing during the daytime because I'd allowed too many other things to crowd into that time...)

So I said, "Honey, if you wouldn't mind, we could watch something I've seen before so I could also keep plugging away at my sermon while we're sitting on the couch together." But, as those words were coming out of my mouth, I realized how hypocritical they were!

Quality Time happens to be one of Derrick's top love languages and, there I was, suggesting we watch something I'd seen before specifically so I could divide my attention between the work I had left to do and spending time with my wonderful husband.

Of course, the ultimate irony of the situation was that the work I would have been doing was work on my sermon about Quality Time...my sermon about the importance of giving someone your *undivided* attention.

Immediately after I made the suggestion, I took it back – pointing out how ridiculous it was for me to suggest such a thing...simply because I hadn't gotten enough of my sermon writing done during the day when he was at work and when I was *supposed* to be writing all day.

So I put my computer away and we chose a goofy movie we both love and to which we could put our full attention. And, since we'd both seen it many times, we had fun saying the lines and laughing together through favorite scenes...things that wouldn't have happened in the same way had I also been working on my sermon.

Now. Back to Jesus, Mary, and Martha ...and today's scriptural illustration of the importance of Quality Time – the gift of undivided attention.

The story of Jesus with Mary and Martha often casts negativity upon women rather than men. After all, it's a story about two women, one of whom seems to get chastised by Jesus...so it's not surprising that women *tend* to bear the brunt of this story's challenge.

But, women, in general, are not the target of this story. In fact, the story of Jesus with Mary and Martha is not even meant to negatively target people who enjoy keeping a tidy house or who like to work hard playing host or hostess. It can *feel* like that's what the story is about...but it's not.

Lots of people enjoy the kind of housekeeping required in order to make their homes look nice and cozy. But, let's be honest, some of us might – on occasion – spend so much time and energy keeping the *house* that we forget to spend enough time and energy on the *people* with whom we *share* the house...whether members of our household or guests who are passing through.

That's what's happening with Martha in today's story. She got into such a frenzy over the household chores related to *hosting* a guest, that she forgot to focus on the *guest* she was hosting.

This is what the love language “Quality Time” is all about: it's about putting plenty of time and energy into focusing on the *people* in our lives, rather than getting distracted by other tasks.

Whether the task is related to housekeeping, or its other kinds of work, or it's plunking around on social media...it's very easy to distract ourselves from quality time with other people.

When Martha begged Jesus to tell Mary to help her with her household tasks, Jesus did not respond by telling Martha she should never do household tasks. We all need to do our part when it comes to household tasks. Jesus wasn't telling Martha *not* to take care of the house.

What Jesus was telling Martha was that Mary had chosen to give her undivided attention to him...their guest...and that, in that moment, Mary's undivided attention was far more important than whatever household tasks Martha was attending to.

When the people in our lives give us their undivided attention, God's love is shining through them onto us. Because the great good news for us today is that, though God loves *all* of us, God loves each of us...and in an undivided way. Let me say that again:

The great good news is that, though God loves *all* of us, God loves each of us...and in an undivided way. It's the miracle of God's amazing love: though it is for everyone, it is uniquely focused for each of us.

And when someone blesses us with the gift of Quality Time, their undivided attention toward us is a reflection of *God's* undivided love.

This season of Lent, may we grow in our attentiveness to our loving God...and may we respond to God's love by growing in the way we share love in this world.