Sermon "Collaboration"
Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20, 25-28, Luke 10:38-42
Sunday, July 27, 2025
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Our first scripture reading is Colossians 1:15-20 and 25-28. The apostle Paul, while imprisoned, writes a letter to the Christians in Colossae, a church grappling with false teachings that undermine the sovereignty of Jesus Christ and advocate for additional practices beyond faith in Christ.

Colossians 1:15-20 are often referred to as a "Christ hymn," as Paul presents a profound portrait of Jesus, emphasizing his preeminence in both creation and redemption. The sovereignty of Christ described in Colossians 1:15-20 is foundational for understanding the mystery, hidden for ages, now revealed to include Gentiles as fellow heirs. Hear now, God's holy word.

15 Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, 16 for in Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through Christ and for Christ. 17 Christ himself is before all things, and in Christ all things hold together. 18 Christ is the head of the body, the church; Christ is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that Christ might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through Christ God was pleased to reconcile to God's self all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross…

25 I became its minister according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, 26 the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to God's saints. 27 To them God chose to make known how great among the gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 It is Christ whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. Amen.

Our second scripture reading includes a portion of the travel narrative in Luke 10. The chapter begins with the commissioning of the seventy. They are sent out on their journeys fully aware of their dependency upon God's gracious love expressed through the hospitality of others. The well-known Samaritan story about four travelers follows the commissioning and serves as a reminder of how vulnerable we all are. The chapter closes with Jesus traveling on his own journey to Jerusalem. He finds refuge in the home of two sisters who were dear friends and gracious hosts. Hear now the Word of God.

38 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. 39 She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. 40 But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; 42 there is need of only one thing.[a] Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." Amen.

The title of the sermon: “Collaboration”

The Text: “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Luke 10:40b

Let us pray: Holy and Loving God, we thank you for the gift of collaboration and for the many nuances and dimensions within the life you call us to live as disciples. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

As a young woman, I remember seeing the 1975 musical A Chorus Line. Set on the stage of a Broadway theater, the musical provides a glimpse into the personalities of seventeen Broadway dancers auditioning for spots on the chorus line as they describe the events that have shaped their lives and their decisions to become dancers. I loved the collaboration in the dancing and resonated with the song “What I did for love.”

Those of us who saw the musical understand that this is not a romantic love song, but rather a song about the profound love for one's passion and career, in this case, the passion for dancing. It's about reflecting on a life dedicated to a pursuit, even with its challenges and potential for loss, and embracing the experiences and sacrifices made for the love of it. “What I Did for Love” expressed my passion for ministry and willingness to accept the sweetness and the sorrow on the travel narrative I chose.

Twelve years ago, this weekend, I preached the candidacy sermon auditioning to serve as Westminster’s eighteenth pastor. It was a culminating day on my personal travel narrative in ministry and an opportunity for which I had prayed and sought for many years… My husband Peter and our son Paul had accompanied me on the turns and forks of that road and encouraged me in the disappointments and challenges along the way.
It was a powerful and poignant moment for me sitting in Westminster’s stunning chancel for the first time. I will forever be grateful to this gracious congregation for the opportunity to lead and to collaborate on the road we have traveled together.

Two weeks ago, as the Rev. Dr. Anne Marshall preached her candidacy sermon and was elected to serve as co-pastor in an intentional act of collaboration before becoming Westminster’s nineteenth pastor, it was another poignant moment for me. Sitting where I was in the chancel, I noticed that the three Mary’s in the Stained-glass window beyond Anne in the pulpit, were smiling with me. The windows, a gift of Porter Paddock, an elder of this church for more than 30 years, were given in loving memory of his wife, Janet Perry Paddock, and the many noble women who have served this church faithfully all the years that are past…who have served and collaborated in ministry, doing what they did “for love.”

Within the travel narrative in today’s reading, Martha was looking for a little collaboration from her sister Mary in the kitchen as she served their guest Jesus. Sadly, over the years, Martha has been criticized for what appears to be a reasonable request. A closer look at the historical and cultural context of this reading along with where it is placed in Luke’s travel narrative enlightens our understanding of this simple, yet profound story.

Luke places the story of Martha and Mary immediately following the story of the Good Samaritan, (the text for Dr. Marshall’s sermon) because each emphasizes important complementary characteristics in the life of a disciple following the commission of the seventy. To the lawyer who is so caught up in studying the Torah that he never learned how to do it,

Jesus shares the story of one who shows mercy and bids him "Go and do likewise." To the young sisters who are caught up in a society that denies them the privilege of studying the Torah, Jesus encourages them "to sit at his feet and to listen to what he is saying."

Luke has taken us on a journey and pointed out the importance of collaboration, balance, and reaching beyond ourselves, doing what we do for love, as disciples of Jesus Christ. Collaboration includes both doing and listening, serving and studying, single-mindedness and multi-tasking. Each of us has a tendency toward a one-dimensional life. We need collaboration within ourselves and with one another to fulfill our calling as disciples.

However, there is something more in both these narratives. When the lawyer asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" he invites Jesus into an ongoing dialogue among first century Jews. There was disagreement as to how far one's responsibility extended in this duty to love. Jesus chose to go beyond this small-minded debate. By bringing a Samaritan into the story, he stripped the lawyer of his pious defenses—exposing his lack of understanding with regard to God, life, and the duty to love.

If the Good Samaritan is a paradox in a Jewish story about the duty to love one's neighbor, then Mary is a paradox in a story about man's duty to study God's word. The cultural distinctions are important in understanding why Mary's behavior was so radical. This was not a woman so caught up in a conversation that she abandoned her sister in the kitchen. To sit at Jesus' feet was to put oneself in the place of a male disciple, violating a clear social boundary. According to rabbinic lore in the Mishnah: "Let thy house be a meeting house for Sages and sit amid the dust of their feet and drink in their words with thirst…but talk not much to womankind." By inviting Mary to sit at his feet, Jesus has affirmed more than a simple act of listening, Jesus has confronted the unreasonable social and educational barriers to women and calls women to full discipleship with their brothers.

These two stories placed side by side exemplify the commandments to love God and to love one's neighbor. Jesus' choice of unlikely characters to illustrate this love– a Samaritan and a woman reveal how we limit collaboration through our own prejudices and the cultural biases that prevent a level playing field for all God's children.

However, Jesus did more than talk about the duty to love. Jesus loved us absolutely, irrationally, and completely when his personal travel narrative culminated in Jerusalem and he embraced the cross. Jesus loved us with his heart, soul, strength, mind and life to expose, to break down, and to free us from the walls of our own hostility and the stereotypes that limit us.

As we seek to be faithful disciples within our own travel narratives, may we share the gift of collaboration by reaching beyond ourselves in love. May we demonstrate the mercy of the Good Samaritan, the courage of Mary, and the hospitality of Martha on the journeys we travel. May we do what we do for love, and when the time comes to say goodbye and travel on, may we embrace the sweetness and the sorrow, wish each other well, and give thanks for the gift was ours to borrow. So be it. Amen.