



Opening Prayer for Ordinary Time

God of adventure and growth,
open our hearts, ready our minds
and fire our imaginations,
so that as we gather together before you,
and ponder the life-giving stories of Jesus,
we might discover more of your goodness,
and be swept up by the Holy Spirit
as she nurtures, disturbs and inspires us
on our journey into fullness of life.
Amen

'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

What sorts of things might distract you from putting God first in your life? What cannot be helped, and what might you lay aside?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise

God of goodness and hope,
you are generous in your hospitality,
and call us to welcome others as you do.
We thank you that you invite us to open our hearts,
to have the courage to cross boundaries,
and that you disturb us when we become too cosy.

Receive our joyful praises, for in you we find life,
in all of its fullness and abundance,
as a gift that grows in the giving away.
In Jesus' name, and the power of the Holy Spirit,
we offer you our worship. **Amen**

Prayers of Renewal

God of costly and self-giving love,
you call us to be people of integrity and justice,
pointing to you in all of our words and actions.
We bring to you those things in need of renewal
in our own lives, and in the life of the world we share:

We bring to you those things for which we are sorry:
God of mercy, forgive us.

We bring to you the burdens we carry and sorrows we bear:
God of love, comfort us.

We bring to you the brokenness and oppression in our world:
God of justice, disturb us.

We bring to you the times we've hidden from the risks of love:
God of courage, fortify us.

We bring to you the failures of the Church to stand for justice:
God of liberation, convict us.

Silence is kept for a few moments...

God of costly and self-giving love,
you call us to be people of integrity and justice
who point to you in our words and actions.
Thank you that you set us free to follow you,
and to be ambassadors for your Kingdom of love. **Amen**

Reading Luke 10:38 – 42

Sermon

Have you ever gone into a different room to do something, but other thoughts and distractions come into your mind and so when you get there, you cannot remember what you originally intended to do? It's all too easy to be thrown off course amidst the demands of a twenty-four-seven world, especially in the turbulent times we currently face. Keeping focused upon God, and the coming of the Kingdom of God, can be something of a challenge. This lies at the heart of the Gospel reading for today, which is a text in need of careful handling. Martha and Mary were two close friends of Jesus, who lived in Bethany with their brother Lazarus. It isn't unusual to come across interpretations of their story that pit the sisters against one another, contrasting the activism of the former with the contemplation of the latter. However, closer inspection reveals that is not what is going on here.

Jesus was journeying from Galilee up to Jerusalem, having not long ago sent out pairs of disciples ahead to prepare the way for him and his Kingdom message. The urgency of their task was such that they were to travel light and not linger in places that did not welcome the peace they were to share (Luke 10:1 – 11). Before that, he had sent away perspective disciples who wanted to finish other things before following him (9:57 – 62). When Jesus arrived in what Luke calls 'a certain village', Martha welcomed him into her home (10:38), but as she set about those various tasks which needed doing, presumably preparing a meal amongst them, Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to him teach. This might sound unremarkable to us, but at that time, it was a highly radical thing to do. An experienced Rabbi would gather followers around them, who would sit at their feet and learn from the expert, as it were. However, this role was not open to women; rabbis had to be men. Consequently, Jesus and Mary were subverting the rigid gender 'norms' of the day by what they were doing. Meanwhile,

Martha was getting all the more distracted and angry (10:39 – 40a), it appears...

The Greek word used in 10:40a for 'distracted' (*periespato*) doesn't simply mean getting on with necessary jobs; instead, it means being pulled in different directions and being all at sea. Martha was clearly struggling (I imagine one-hundred-and-one thoughts nagging away at her), and when she asked Jesus to intervene and make Mary get up and help (10:40b), she implied that he had not noticed and didn't care about the strain she was under. At this point, the temptation is to argue that Jesus' response in 10:41 – 42 was a rebuke of Martha and her activity, so that we (and women especially) need to become more like Mary in her contemplation. Yet, I don't read it like that, not least as the way Jesus repeats Martha's name suggests tenderness and not anger. I think what we have here is an invitation to lay aside those things which were pulling her in many different directions, and join Mary and sit at his feet. In her eagerness to offer hospitality, it's clear that Martha had forgotten the most important aspect of what it meant – really listening to her guest. For me, this makes most sense of Jesus pointing to Mary as having chosen the 'better part' (10:42); he was not rebuking Martha so much as inviting her to embrace the life of the Kingdom with the same urgency her sister had, and which had shaped his instructions and teaching on the road.

For us today, it is so easy to get distracted from following Jesus and embracing the Kingdom that he inaugurated, and continues to build through the power of the Holy Spirit. Life throws so much temptation in our paths at times, especially when the wider context within which we find ourselves is marked by such uncertainty. This goes beyond the busyness needed to survive and thrive, and like Martha, we may find ourselves pulled in all sorts of different directions. Yet, just as Jesus invited her to join Mary in sitting at his feet, we too are invited to choose the better part. In Jesus and through the Spirit, God offers us a still place in which we can find grounding, and refreshment and

rest when we are weary and carrying heavy burdens. I wonder what that looks like in practice for you? It could mean a quiet time at some stage during your day, or a prayerful walk – with or without a canine companion! – or meeting with others to pray and to share. Whatever helps you to stay connected to God is worth giving time to, and thus, in the words of a hymn by Andrew Pratt, let us pray:

We come to you with no pretence, yet nourished by your grace.
We come as people needing love within this time and place.

We come confessing all we are, yet all we have to give.
We ask for your renewing power to teach us how to live.

We need your spirit to be strong, your risking, leaping faith,
that brings the love of God to bear in every aching space.

So, from this point, restored, renewed, we pledge to take your way;
to live responding to your call with each succeeding day.

Recommended Resource of the Week

Phillip Elser and Ron Piper's 2006 work *Lazarus, Mary and Martha: A Social-Scientific Reading of John* explores relationships between the three siblings and what we can learn about the resurrection.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord's Prayer

Blessing