

'A Time for *Everything?!* July 21, 2019
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We live in what is called by some 'THE INFORMATION AGE.'
We have more information at our disposal
than any generation before us!
We are inundated, flooded (drowned) with pieces, bits...
or should I be saying **bytes** of information of all kinds.

My own observation, though, is that
a more accurate name for our time would be
'THE AGE OF DISTRACTION.'
It seems like everybody & everything is out to get our attention.
One way it's done is by distracting us
from whatever it is we're doing or TRYING TO DO.

I recall a time when my husband Dave and I
were walking through an airport, on our way to find
the next connecting gate to our destination.
We were greeted by screen & voice messages
JUST FOR US all along the way.
All we were doing was trying to keep the gate #
and time of flight take-off in our heads!

It still disconcerts me
While I'm working my way through a grocery list at the store
& at the end of an aisle, I hear a friendly, enthusiastic voice
offering ME some wonderful product or a great way to prepare it.
Sometimes I think the voice of a friend or neighbor...
which I wouldn't mind!

Or how about when you're watching TV news
with that scrolling at the bottom of the screen?

It's hard for me to concentrate on what the anchor person is reporting!
Hey, if you'd like,
you can have more than one screen at a time on your TV.

Pop-up messages on our computers is another thing.
Sure, I know they help pay for the program,
but I'd rather not be interrupted
when I'm checking or sending emails, or working on a sermon.

And then, there are cell or smartphones- almost universal!
I haven't heard many cell phones go off in sanctuaries,
but I've heard some great stories from colleagues!
With the availability of different ring tones,
it can get very interesting!

In one church, a member of the choir was actively texting
as the choir processed to the choir loft during the opening hymn.
I wonder how he was even able to do that!
When I was in a bell choir years ago,
I had trouble just walking and playing at the same time!

Another colleague tells the story of a cell phone incident
during a wedding ceremony.
As she was inviting the couple to voice their vows,
the grooms cell phone rang.
He looked at, turned to the bride and said,
"IT'S FOR YOU!"

On a more dangerous note, the use of cell phones
to talk hands-free or not, or to text while driving,
is definitely resulting in more traffic accidents & deaths.

The ironic thing is that even those who are bombarding us

with so many messages are finding
that it's hard even for them to get our attention.
That's why the tempo, brightness and volume
of these kinds of messages are ramped up continually!

All these things are getting more and more personal!
I don't know about YOU,
but I find myself more and more distracted,
going from one task to another,
finding it hard to finish the first one!

Even something as uncomplicated as setting up coffee
for the next morning.
Sometimes I'll stop somewhere in the process
because something else gets my attention.
I've done things like forgetting to put the Kuerigg cup in
or not pouring in water for brewing...
Neither of these things is a nice surprise
when I try to pour my much needed
leaded coffee in the morning!

AM I ALONE IN THIS???!!!!

Guess not....
I've already heard some of you use the excuse of senior moments
for the inability to stay on task or remember names, dates,
or why you came into a room.
But I've got to tell you that I've experience these same voids,
and one time,
One of the children, a 7 yr. old, from a former church
walked into the parish hall after playing outside and said,
"Pastor Jane, I can't remember WHY I came in here!"

So, I believe it's not so much an age issue,

but largely, an information overload issue.

HOW NOT TO BE DISTRACTED

is something we need to master for our very survival.
Because it could be (I say this a bit with tongue in cheek)
that some day in the future,
none of us will remember anything
and be perfectly happy with it....

Because we won't remember any other way!

I wish that I could tell you exactly how NOT to be distracted.
But I'm not sure I have (or remember?) the perfect, end all answer.
Maybe, just maybe,
our gospel story for today can at least give us some hope.

This Gospel story (as often happens!)
seems to have been written for such a time!
I, you, WE...need to hear what it has to say to us!

Jesus is visiting the home of Mary & Martha,
his followers and sisters of his friend Lazarus.
I had one seminary professor who called them the M&M sisters!

They live in the town of Bethany,
which isn't too far from Jerusalem
This wasn't the first time that Jesus visited their home.
He often stopped in for rest, company and meals.
But it was one of the last times he would visit here...
he WAS on his last trip to Jerusalem.

I imagine that Jesus was tired, hot & looking forward
to a warm welcome, which is just what he received.
And please notice that it is Martha
who is the first to welcome Jesus into their home.

She is a wonderful host!

But somehow, (maybe trying to be Martha STEWART?)
she becomes DISTRACTED.

Maybe the appetizers aren't quite ready,
the flowers still need to be arranged,
or a special sauce need her touch.

Finally, she is SO distracted that she feels put upon
& complains to Jesus,
"Tell Mary to make herself useful-
I sure could use an extra hand here!"

In Martha's view, Mary was NO help at all.
Mary decided to take her place at the feet of Jesus & listen.
Really, besides not helping Martha,
it's just outrageous for Mary to sit at Jesus' feet!
After all, other rabbis of that time would say,
"It is better to burn the Torah than to teach it to a woman."
Seems Jesus was ahead of his time
in terms of women's rights!

But let's not overlook the fact also,
That Jesus was concerned about Martha,
even if not in the way
that Martha wanted him to be right then!
That's why he says gently, "Martha, Martha,
You are worried & distracted by many things;
there is need for only one thing."

Now, let's be fair to Martha....

I'm sure we've all had times when we felt put upon.

I remember when I was younger, living at home with my parents,

That I felt it was terribly unfair that I had to do dishes every night
(my Mom didn't buy a dishwasher until I moved away from home)
...while my brother only had to take out the garbage!

Even here at church, we might feel that way just a bit
when the # of workers lessen & everyone (but YOU)
is on their way home.

It is the Marthas of the world
who are left to put trash into the dumpsters & turn out lights.
It's easy to feel that maybe others aren't pulling their weight.

One line I always remember from the movie 'Christmas Story'
is when little Ralphie notes that
His mother has not had a hot meal for herself in 15 years,
(so busy is she waiting on everyone else.)
Have you known someone like this?

While Martha is busy waiting on everyone else,
she gets no practical help from Mary, and worse yet,
Mary can probably be seen through the kitchen doorway,
sitting at Jesus' feet, absorbing every word he says.

Can't you just hear Martha mumbling under her breath,
"Sure wish I had time to do that.
But someone has to do the work.
You sure can't count on Mary to help!"

This is not a story that says that study or meditation
is better or more important than doing or action.
And it's not a critique of housework or cleaning or cooking
...or such work at church.

Actually, every church needs Marthas...male and female.
It's because of them that church buildings get fixed & cleaned,
light bulbs get changed, door get locked,
budgets get presented...and on and on.

Actually, Martha could have been working at anything
and had the same problem: distraction!

Martha is distracted all right!

Notice that when Jesus is trying to get her attention,
he has to call her name not once, but twice.

So, how do WE keep OURSELVES from being distracted...
especially in our time?!

Even Martha couldn't do it in her time!

How does one NOT become distracted?: Just look at Mary!
She decided not to miss out on what Jesus might teach her
while he's in their home.

She just sits at his feet and listens.

She give Jesus her 'UNDIVIDED' attention...
hangs onto every word he says.

I noticed that while our dog Gracie was alive,
there was one thing SURE to capture her attention.
That thing was food of almost every type!
She would sit by us if we were eating, enthralled & focused.
If she'd been a trained pointer dog, she would have pointed at food!
It was really hard to distract her attention away from food.
Usually, we'd have to put her in another room while we ate.

How do YOU not become distracted?

By being focused like Mary at the feet of Jesus,
or Gracie at the side of someone eating.

by knowing that ONE thing is needed. Only ONE.

Sit with a book by a quiet lake or be captured by a rainbow,
and you know what Mary chose.

Meditate or pray during communion,
light a candle in the dim darkness on Christmas Eve...
and let the candlelight glow...

...then you will discover the one thing needed.

It's like Soren Kierkegaard,

The Danish philosopher I studied in college once said,
"Purity of heart is to will or experience one thing."

I would add: AT A TIME.

I remember when my son Phil was in college
and trying to write a paper.

He was experiencing 'writer's block.'

I watched him pace up and down the living room,
becoming more and more agitated.

Finally, he said, "Mom, how do you do this week after week?"

I answered him,

"First of all, it's helpful to have a deadline.

And second of all, at some point,

I have to sit myself down in front of the computer."

He didn't appreciate my advice at that moment,

but soon enough I saw him sitting at the computer
and working away at what turned into a pretty good paper!

The only way Mary could learn was to give Jesus her 'undivided
attention.'

What she learned from Jesus

was something that would last long after the meal was over
and the dishes washed and put away.

In the Wisdom book of Ecclesiastes,
We read that there's a time & a season for EVERYTHING...
For every matter under heaven...
A time to be born and a time to die.
A time to break down and a time to build up.
A time to cry and a time to laugh.
A time to be silent and a time to speak up.

And for today, I would add:
A time to labor and a time to love.
A time to worship and a time to work.
A time to be Martha and a time to be Mary.
Timeliness and balance.

That's something we need to learn in our time
as never before!
I believe that our well-being depends on it...
our memories... maybe even our sanity.
THAT'S why Jesus is so unrelenting about it
in TODAY'S Gospel story! AMEN.