

Sunday, July 20, 2025

The Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

Festal Eucharist

11:00 am

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Mark Schultz

on

Genesis 18:1-10a; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42

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Paying Attention to What Matters Most

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

It will come as no great surprise to many of you that

When I was much much younger, I wanted something terrible to be a wizard when I grew up. This was really career option number one, except it seemed impractically difficult to pursue. My parents were reluctant to let me wear robes all day,
(try as I might to persuade them otherwise)

And finding a lonely tower furnished with

“many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,” Clouded in magical mists breathed by nearby dragons and swarmed by ominous clouds of croaking ravens,
Delivering secrets from far-off kingdoms

or strange non-Euclidean dimensions of uncomfortably angled space All that seemed like a long shot in sunny Southern California.

So I adjusted my ambitions and thought...well...wizards study a lot And I can study. So: I will. And...I did. I became a little magpie, gathering bits and bobs of information,

Random facts, or delighting in little more than

pondering “forgotten lore” of which, as I soon discovered, the world is actually quite chock full. My father would quiz me every morning with random Questions of the Day
To which I was loath to ever have to respond with, “I don’t know.”

Because I wanted to know everything about everything.

Now, knowing things means very little without a vision to sustain the knowing, Without a vision to root all the world’s stuff in a fabric of meaning.

Knowing a lot of things is no great or worthwhile endeavor If you can’t tell what any of it actually means. It’s just stuff—flattened, anodyne, little more than data, bits and bytes, muddled up magpie mishmashes,

the richness of the world reduced to trivia. What's the powdered orange juice astronauts drink?
What's the capital of Argentina?

How many miles from here to the sun?

How many children in the United States lack health insurance? Particularly in our own technological age,
when we're constantly inundated with information of one sort or another And vision often seems in short
supply,
We're discovering how adept we can be

at one of the most diabolical and direful works of dark magic: The ability to render anything abjectly
meaningless.

Here's the thing that I didn't understand at all when I was younger. Knowledge without love is one of the
most useless, desperate and cruel things That you could ever imagine.
Love, as the mystics affirm, is the highest form of knowing.

There is in love all knowledge in its fullness, because God is love in its fullness

And God knows all things, in their fullness, in and through love— Not as data, and this is key, but in and
as relationship.

Knowledge, when it submits itself to love, opens the way to wisdom.

St. Paul's great hymn to the pre-incarnate Christ in Colossians that we just heard owes a lot to the Hebrew
scriptures' vision of Wisdom

Wisdom as the loving active creative power of God, through whom and in whom and for whom All things
were made in God's own infinite delight;

Wisdom as the one who is the fabric in which all things are rooted and co-inhere— And yes: a 'who', not a
'what'

Because Wisdom is not a faculty of God not a thing in God

But God in Joyful and loving relationship to God...and to all created things. John's Gospel names Wisdom:
the Word, the Logos,

The living divine Pattern that patterns all things to which God has given the gift of being. Jesus, the
Wisdom of God, the Power of God, the Word of God

Is the one, Paul affirms, in whom the fullness of God dwells, from whom the fullness of creation is
brought forth

Through whom all is reconciled to God

By whose illuminating presence, all things have any meaning. Jesus is the living wisdom that holds all
things in love:

God's own living and eternal vision of God in love with God and in love with us and with all of creation
through us.

By contrast, in knowledge without love, in knowing without love, everything is severed from its root,
rendered meaningless

Available to us as a thing to dominate or control and to which we can give our own meaning, if we like

This is why the tree in the garden of Eden that occasioned the fall Is the Tree of Knowledge

Not because knowledge is bad or knowing things is wrong

But because knowledge without love is always separation, isolation, diminishment, death, of one sort or another. Though in our sinfulness, we tend to mistake all that for power.

And it's on those things, with and by those things, that we built our wasted world

In the shadow of the garden of love that we would not, and in our ongoing sin, will not Tend or keep.

Our call as Christians, is not to know more, but to love more.

Our call, as Christians, is to the way of love, the way of wisdom, the way of Jesus, The way of reconciliation, the way, indeed, of the cross.

It is in the cross that the wisdom of God is most gloriously manifest. The slings and arrows, the suffering, the misfortunes of this world

The illness, the pain, the deep deep anguish that we all know or have known That the world would like very much to eradicate but, in its fallenness, can only perpetuate or numb

And can therefore never fully know and can never understand as meaningful, Can only be revealed as meaningful, and healed

In the light of the love of God in Christ who suffers with us, for us, in love, In order to exalt us, in love.

In the Cross we can see: all of human life, all of it all of it all of it Is meaningful on account of the one who shared our life with us, Who loves us and holds us in love

And we can only truly recognize that meaningfulness, in ourselves and in each other If we pay attention to the one in whom we are deeply rooted, the one by whom, in whom, and for whom we were made.

And this requires us to pray, which is to say: it requires us to pay attention.

Easier said than done, of course.

As many of you know, our Gospel reading of Mary and Martha has been, throughout the ages Interpreted as an allegory of the apparent conflict between the active and the contemplative life,

The life of service, of ministry, and the life of prayer.

But insofar as it's been interpreted in that way, as conflict between these ways of life, I humbly submit that it has been interpreted poorly,

and against the whole witness of Scripture and Christian Tradition

Which would maintain that our lived life is not separate from our prayer— they are meant to be one and the same.

I think it's more meaningful to see this Gospelstory as about attention, not conflict. Mary is praised by our Lord not because she privileges prayer over action

But because she's paying attention to what gives both prayer and action their energy

Their force, their power, their glory, their ability to bear love, reveal love, nurture love: She's paying attention to love's Lord, Love's life: Jesus himself.

Martha begins by paying this attention,

she desires to welcome the one who is our true Welcome, it's very clear She wants to pay attention...and she becomes distracted,
 not merely by the multitude of tasks that proper hospitality demands, But by envy. Envy uproots her service, evacuating it of love, of delight,
 Envy becomes her vision rendering all she's doing a mere chore with which, and she's very cross about this,
 She is receiving no help at all from her sister. She's lost her attention to what truly matters: Love
 The one thing that could give her labor meaning and its gone

And the only thing that is getting her through what has to get done Is will, not love, not joy, but force of will

And it is exhausting and frustrating and desolating and pointless Distraction. She's lost the center, she's lost the vision of love. When our text says that Martha was "cumbered about much serving" The Greek word here (sometimes translated "distracted")
 Means to be dragged about. Compelled.

The envy that is in her, that is not truly her, that is distracting her, is running her It's the power that pits one against another

The power of competition, of strife, of violence The power of sin and the power death.

It is precisely the thing that Christ came among us to undo once and for all, And here he gently undoes it in Martha

The one needful thing is to pay attention, to be focused on the One who is love To sit at his feet, to be shaped, formed, by his loving regard,
 Into an instrument and channel of that love To a world sorely in need of it.
 And that is the work of grace we call prayer.

Simone Weil says it this way, "Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer. If we turn our mind towards the good [which is to say, to Jesus],
 it is impossible that little by little the whole soul will not be attracted thereto" to the infinite fullness of the majesty of God's love.

In choosing the one needful thing: the fullness of God's love in Christ, In receiving the grace to be rooted there in that fullness

So that all our doing is a blossoming in us, with us, through us, of that fullness, We discover that the better part:

Goodness beyond knowing, Love that is unbounded, Joy that is full, Peace that passes understanding,
 All that becomes ours, not to keep, but to live, to be, and to share.

Paying attention to the Needful Thing, Love, necessitates action in the world To meet the pain in our neighbor, to meet the reality of the world,

To know the deep meaningfulness of all things, of all human life as held in God's love Rooted, caught up, in God's life.

I hope you'll take it from this former wizard wannabe:

If there is any real magic in this world (and I think there is) It is love.

If there's anything worth knowing in this world (and I think there is): It's only worth knowing in and through love,

in and through the wisdom of God, Jesus Christ, the center of all things, who is Love In whom all creation finds its meaning

And if we can pay attention to this Love, undistracted, We will learn from God how to love as God loves: completely, wildly, exuberantly, meaningfully;

And as all our lonely wizard towers crumble and our attention to love has made of us

A people of love who cannot help but pay attention to the world's need, our neighbor's need Who reach out in love, in community with each other

We will know the deepest secret, the deepest magic anyone ever has known or ever will know: We will know ourselves and each other as Beloved.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.
