

“Living our Membership Vow through Presence”

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Luke 10:38-42

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I've been taking yoga at the Tae Kwon Do studio owned by U Yong Skroback, one of our church members. The instructor, Richard, is very good, but he speaks the language of yoga, which is foreign. Some of the words are literally foreign, like “namista.” Some are English, but still confusing. Melt your heart toward the floor. Breathe through your body. Get into cactus position. I think there should be a yoga dictionary for new students. This experience makes me wonder how nonbelievers understand church talk. “Jesus died for your sins.” “You must be born again.” “Jesus wants a personal relationship with you.” Doesn't that sound odd? How can I have a personal relationship with Jesus, who died 2000 years ago? It's not like we're going to hang out in the Vista or catch lunch at Maggie's Market. Perhaps Luke can shed light on this question today. In today's passage, we see that Jesus invites us into a relationship, but to build that relationship, we must let go of distractions, and take time to sit at his feet.

The gospel lesson begins with “. . . as they went on their way.” Jesus and his disciples have been on the road, and they are ready for a pit stop. They enter the home of Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus. Like most sisters, these two have different personalities. Martha is interested in hospitality, serving. She's the doer. Mary wants to sit quietly and listen to Jesus. Now before we judge Martha for lack of interest in Jesus, remember it was Martha who “welcomed him into her home.” And she is tending to their needs, probably preparing dinner. She complains to Jesus, and has good reason. Mary is not helping, and it was the role of women to do household chores and serve the men. Women were not allowed in rabbinic circles. They were excluded from many social and religious arenas, and often treated as property. A man could divorce his wife if she didn't “measure up” on the honeymoon. A women's role was to produce offspring, and if she failed, she was considered less “valuable.” So it was quite radical for Jesus to welcome Mary into his circle. It will not be the first or last time he invites an outcast into a relationship. He ate dinner with Zacchaeus, a greedy tax collector. He offered living water to the Samaritan woman. He connected with the hurting and the broken, the empty and the needy, the selfish and the sinner. If you fit any of those descriptions, then Jesus wants a relationship with you.

Mary wanted a relationship with Jesus. She “chose the better” part, the one thing, the most important thing. Colossians 1:18 states, “he might come to have first place in everything.” Mary wanted to be fully present with Jesus. In our membership vows, we promise our presence. Is that so church attendance figures can increase or is it so our faith can increase? Does it simply mean being present in worship or is it more than that? Are you present with Jesus? You can not have a personal relationship with someone you don't know very well, although I hear some people have hundreds of friends on Facebook. How do you build a personal relationship with anyone – a friend, your spouse, your child? It's through spending time together, getting to know one another, communicating. So when are you present at the feet of Jesus? When was the last time you did a study on Jesus? Pastor Scott had about 25 people in a book study on Jesus during adult Vacation Bible School. And you thought VBS was just for kids! Last Wednesday night, I dropped by a new Bible study that The Word Sunday school class is doing. Every Monday morning, our Women's Bible Study sits at the feet of Jesus. This fall, we hope to start home

based small groups, studying Jesus. We build a personal relationship with Jesus through worship, studying the Word, and prayer. The prayer insert offers you ways to improve your relationship with Jesus through communication. In any relationship there are times when things get stagnant, routine, boring. There may be times when you think Jesus doesn't hear your prayers, or is not interested in you. There may be times when you don't feel his presence. But even if you wander away from him, he is still interested in you. He is always with you, even when you don't think so. The Footprints poem reminds us of that.

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there were one set of footprints. This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints. So I said to the Lord, "You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there have only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, you have not been there for me?" The Lord replied, "The times when you have seen only one set of footprints in the sand, is when I carried you." -Mary Stevenson

Jesus is present with us, even when we may not be fully attentive to him. We may want to experience his presence or power or peace, but like Martha, we are worried and distracted by many things. What kept Martha away was not lack of faith. She was a follower, or she wouldn't have welcomed him into her home. Maybe you've welcomed Jesus into your life a long time ago, or a few years ago, but then life happens. The passage uses four terms: worries, distractions, things and tasks. These are what eat away at our spiritual life. What are you worried and distracted about: illness, aging parents, your job, the economy, school, work, money, family problems. We are distracted by sports, entertainment, hobbies, travel. There is no Sabbath in our culture. People shop, work, and play baseball on Sunday. And then there is technology, which is meant to save us time: cell phones, internet, email, Facebook, texting. The cell phone is the 21st c. pacemaker. We think we can't live without it. I'm just as addicted to the cell phone as you. At the beginning of the Friday night communion service during Blythewood Salkehatchie, I asked the teenagers to be present with Jesus and with one another. We passed the offering plates and filled 4 plates with cell phones. What distractions or worries do you need to set aside, so you can sit still at the feet of Jesus?

Well, as a woman who doesn't like the household chores, I'm grateful Jesus let Mary sit at his feet. But he didn't just welcome women; he invites everyone into a relationship. The challenge is to set aside worries and distractions, to take time to be fully present at his feet. And at his feet, we may notice the scars from the nails. He gave his life on the cross, so that we may have salvation. If that's a foreign word or perhaps overused in church, let me translate. Salvation means that God loves us beyond all measure, even when we don't deserve it. He sent Jesus to build that relationship of love, so that we may have life abundant and everlasting. And that truth should melt your heart, not toward the floor as they say in yoga, but toward God above, who loves you.