

Hear This

Prayer

Tell me. When was the last time you were able to buy a half gallon of ice cream, or orange juice? The containers look the same, the price is the same, but there is less food in the package. What used to be an 8 oz package of sausage is now 6.24 ounces, the can of Coffee that used to be a pound is now 13 oz. sneaky ways to stay legal but actually raise prices.

Gotta wonder if these manufacturers were reading the ancient and cranky prophets to learn how to increase profits.

*Hear this, God said to Amos.
Listen to me, you who walk on helpless people,
you who are trying to destroy the poor people of this country, saying,
5 "When will the New Moon festival be over
so we can sell grain?
When will the Sabbath be over
so we can bring out wheat to sell?
We can charge them more
and give them less,
and we can change the scales to cheat the people.
6 We will buy poor people for silver,
and needy people for the price of a pair of sandals.
We will even sell the wheat that was swept up from the floor."*

The prophet goes on and on, telling of the of judgments that are to come against the nation, because of its acceptance of such treatment of the poor and the vulnerable. There will come a famine upon the land - not a famine due to drought of water, but a famine due to the lack of justice and hope in the land. That famine will be a famine of the word of

God.

*The Lord God says: "The days are coming
when I will cause a time of hunger in the land.
The people will not be hungry for bread or thirsty for water,
but they will be hungry for words from the Lord.*

Our times are like those times. Not just in the arena of food processing, manufacturing, and sales.

Today, as then, debt is become the tool of choice to bankrupt and disenfranchise nations, cities, and families.

Today, poverty for individuals and nations is expected; reinforced and sustained by law.

Today, the law has set a killer free, and we wonder where is the justice for Trevor Martin?

Today, the isms, militarism, consumerism, racism, sexism, ageism are thriving diminishing human spirits, limiting human lives.

Today neither widow, nor orphan, nor stranger are safe, let alone cared for by the nation. Safety nets are being slashed to shreds, almost as we speak.

Today, God need not bother to impose a famine on the prophetic word - because the leaders of the nation, the leaders of the law, the leaders of the corporations are not listening. They have turned a deaf ear to those with little to nothing, listening instead to those who have too much and yet still grasp for more.

'Nuf said. While I must remind us of the bad news, none of us in this room need me to go on a major rant about the bad news. We all know something of the problems and issues that arise out of our human capacity for sin and our apathy in the face of suffering.

Gathered in this room are dedicated, generous folk who work hard at making our little bit of the world more humane, more compassionate and caring. Here, in this room are folk who already know the bad news, and therefore work hard to bring about the good news by sharing food

with the hungry, support where there is need, and kindness with the brokenhearted. Did you hear those words, “working hard”? Where are we to find the strength, the willingness, the passion, the generosity, the compassion and patience to work hard to make the good news real?

Today as we sit in the Mary and Martha chapel, the story that gave this chapel its name, is on our agenda for this morning and provides a useful perspective on our question. “Where do we find the strength, the willingness, the passion, the generosity, the compassion and patience to work hard to make the good news real?”

38 While Jesus and his followers were traveling, Jesus went into a town. A woman named Martha let Jesus stay at her house. 39 Martha had a sister named Mary, who was sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to him teach. 40 But Martha was busy with all the work to be done. She went in and said, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me alone to do all the work? Tell her to help me.”

41 But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things. 42 Only one thing is important. Mary has chosen the better thing, and it will never be taken away from her.” New Century Version

Many people take the Mary-Martha story as models for two sides, two facets of our lives. Our doing. Our active side. And. Our Being. Our contemplative side, our capacity to become a mystic.

In this perspective, Martha is all about our doing, our laboring in the food pantry, in writing letters and emails of advocacy, in our families, in Sunday School, in whatever we are doing to bring the good news and serve others. In our doing, Martha is our patron saint.

Mary, on the other hand, is the patron saint of our being, our becoming, our prayer as rest and trust in God, our silent conversation with God, our discovery of God as God lives and breathes within our souls and spirits.

Many believe that we have a natural, an inborn bent, an inclination to prefer one side of our self over the other. Some are more Mary, others

more Martha, simply by nature. We, in the UCC, as a progressive church with our bent toward justice ministries, and social activism, tend to the Martha side. We hear the word from James, *be ye doers of the word* with clarity. I suspect that what is true of us as a denomination is also true of us as the people who are First Church, we are more Martha than Mary. We are more comfortable working in the kitchen than sitting at the feet of Jesus,

And yet - as individuals, as congregations and as the United Church of Christ, it is the love of God, Christ and others that nourishes the soul, providing the energy and the willingness to speak truth to power, do the work of feeding the hungry, and teach the children.

Where is it that we can sit at the feet of Jesus to listen? To rest? To breathe?

In the summer I get to sit on a deck and watch as birds do their respective birdly things. Woodpeckers head for the suet, Chickadees feast on sunflower seeds, hummers lap up the nectar. Where do you find beauty? Where is your quiet place? What for you constitutes sitting at the feet of Jesus? Where can you just be when your Mary side says, let's sit down?

If the story of Martha and Mary tells us anything, surely it tells us that it is a good thing to sit, to listen, to rest at the feet of Jesus. Surely this story tells us that it is ok to let our Mary side lead us to our quiet places, where we can rest, and be refreshed, where we can immerse ourselves, and simply float in the love of God.

I believe that just as God says "hear this" to those who walk on the helpless people; I believe God also says "Hear this" to us when we are running full tilt in our best Martha mode.

"Hear this" the table is ready. Come and eat.

"Hear this" the place of holy silence is ready. Come and rest.

"Hear this." It is time to be Mary. Come to the place of love and be refreshed in spirit and soul.