

“Welcoming God to Our Lives, Minds, and Homes”

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Sunday, July 21, 2013

In today’s readings from Genesis [18:1-14] and Luke [10:38-42], the homes of God’s friends are visited by God in human form and who then is eagerly invited in. The challenge in both is that while hospitality is abundant, the willingness to openly receive the blessings being offered is lacking. Through these stories, we are being told that God expects us to put aside our preconceptions and accept the blessings offered to us in whatever form they come.

In today’s passage from Genesis, Abraham goes all out to welcome his guests and to provide for their needs. He washes their feet, he has his wife Sarah bake them some bread using the best flour available, he slaughters the fatted calf, and he gives them cream and milk. No one can fault his generosity and in return he is told of the blessing he and

Sarah will receive. When Sarah overhears the blessing proclaimed, a blessing that by all accounts should be impossible, that she will have a son at her advanced age, she secretly laughs. The Lord knowing her disbelief responds with a version of the familiar admonishment, “O ye of little faith.”

God already knows that Abraham and Sarah are good people and has greater plans and expectations for them. God reminds them that blessings come in unexpected ways and at unexpected times. God is teaching them and us that it is important to be open to the blessings of life and not to reject a blessing just because it is beyond our understanding.

Luke’s recounting of Jesus’ visit with Mary and Martha that we heard this morning uses contrasting approaches to welcoming a guest to demonstrate the same point about how God wants to be accepted by us. Martha’s approach follows that of Abraham and Sarah because she sees her role as hostess as providing impeccable hospitality and working to provide comfort and necessities to her guest. Mary’s approach is

different; Mary sits down with Jesus and listens. When Martha becomes upset that her sister is neglecting the work she believes to be essential and making her life harder, Martha complains to Jesus about it. Jesus then essentially tells Martha, “Relax, Mary understands that there are things more important than running around trying to be needed.”

While Jesus appreciates the efforts of Martha and all who look to serve, he is pointing out that it is more important to be present to each other. Mary, by placing herself at Jesus’ feet and listening to him has provided more with her presence and undivided attention than Martha could with all her distracted hard work. In return for opening her mind and heart as well as her home to Jesus, she receives the blessings of God’s teaching through the words of Jesus. This shows us that the most welcoming act of being present to someone leads to the blessing of greater wisdom and knowledge.

The inside the Beltway culture that we live in makes it hard enough to feel we have time to meet our own needs let alone those of others. This is an illusion. If we slow down and take the time to be

present with each other, then we will find that much of what we give up by making our time and selves open to others was not necessary in the first place. We will also find that we will receive in turn from others that which we need most and will truly see God's image in each other.