

Cordon Bleu
Luke 10: 38-42

The book of Genesis tells us that in the beginning, when God began creating things on Earth, God made humans in God's own image. Male and female is what the text tells us, with God breathing life into them. People are equally loved into being, each one known by God from their genetic make-up to the first time a person smiles as a baby, and onward in their allotted time in the world until one draws a final breath.

Sometimes the world doesn't feel so equal when one gets relegated to certain roles in society because of one's gender. This seems to be the case particularly when one is living in a patriarchal society. However, the notions of inheritance and other societal norms get turned on their heads when a matriarchal society is encountered.

Matrilineal societies can be experienced in a few nations of people living on the African continent. The Wodaabe in Chad and the Yao, who live in southern Malawi and northern Mozambique, are some of the people amongst whom patriarchy plays a diminished role. One of the Wodaabe customs that continues to fascinate me is the fact that a woman may choose up to five husbands. So, if I were a member of that nation, I could be Mrs. Aaron Rodgers, Mrs. Steph Curry, Mrs. Joe Montana, Mrs. Denzel Washington, and Mrs. Juan Luis Guerra all at the same time. Ok, no, I'm kidding. Only one husband will do. However, as a member of the Yao people if I were to get married, my fiancé would first have to build a home for us in the city in which I live. Our children would be named by my side of the family, and they would grow up speaking Yao. Girls are raised with a strong sense of self-worth. It should not have been of any surprise to people who observed my cousins, siblings and me playing in our make-believe city that this is the case among the Yao. In our playtime, I worked as the pediatrician and the pastor. My male cousins often laughed at me for selecting those roles because they insisted that girls could never be clergy. Upsetting the applecart of expected gender roles was an important endeavor of my

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mother. Mum was a broadcaster early in her career, and she produced, presented, and directed documentary films for the United Nations, and her own radio and television shows. One of the shows that she had was called *International Cuisine*. Mum invited the wives of ambassadors or the ambassadors themselves to come and showcase the preparation of their national dishes.

Cooking meals requires certain skills, a lot of practice and the art of blending spices to add the right seasoning to the food. Recipes can be handed down from generation to generation in a family, shared among friends or gleaned from the many cooking shows that there are on television. Julia Child used to hold audiences captive with her show, but now there are several others that offer culinary advice to budding chefs. Presenting a favorite dish can be difficult, particularly if there is a lot of preparation involved. One has to wash the produce, and chop and slice, sauté the ingredients and make sure that nothing gets burned. At times, particularly if we are running late, it can almost feel as if we are contestants on Iron Chef or Top Chef and trying to complete our cooking to present an exquisite spread. If one's guests arrive early, one may be torn between engaging in conversation and finishing the dinner preparations.

During the time that my mum's show, *International Cuisine*, was on the tele, my cousins, siblings and I had outgrown playing house. In order to keep us occupied during one vacation, my mum decided to teach us all how to cook and bake. The boys immediately wanted to separate into teams that would compete against each other: there was the Ababa or Boys Cooking Club and the Amama or Girls Cooking Club. We were given recipes and the ingredients to prepare a new dish each day. Mum would judge the presentation and taste the food to determine the winners. We relished the competition and cooked up a storm and got to eat the delicious delights at the end of the day for supper. One of our favorite culinary tasks was preparing for 4 o'clock tea. We learned to make tomato, cucumber, ham, and cheese sandwiches that had the crusts cut

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off and then were neatly quartered into triangles. The *pièce de la résistance* was the scrumptious chocolate cake that my cousin learned to bake. As soon as it had cooled enough to be removed from the baking tray and before he put on the icing, we all gathered around to take a whiff of the cake. The group of us inhaled and exclaimed in unison: mmm, mint.

My aunt, one of my mother's sisters-in-law, was very upset that her sons were doing women's work. Mum went to speak to my aunt, saying that she was not going to allow the boys in the family to grow up with the ill-conceived notion that they could just lay around the house or play while the girls learned to clean and cook and wash. Her intention was that all the children in the extended family would be brought up with the same mores and approach to life. In her view, all work was of equal value and so everyone should learn how to do it.

Women in our cultural nation are consulted on every major decision that is made, and royal ascension to throne is accomplished through one's mother. The fact that one is a member of the Yao nation is much like the affiliation that is experienced in Jewish circles. Even with that matriarchal norm, societal roles among the people who Jesus encountered were still differentiated along the lines of gender.

In today's scripture reading, we meet Jesus at the home of his best friends. He is warmly received and then a flurry of activity begins. Martha sets about chopping onions and grinding sumac and other spices to add to the food. Perhaps, in her frantic preparation, she realizes that the bread for the meal still needs to be prepared and baked and yet her task of making the lamb stew and gathering the mint and basil are taking longer than usual. Martha is acting like anyone of us would, should one's guests arrive early. One may be torn between engaging in conversation and finishing the dinner preparations. She complains to Jesus, asking him to encourage her sister

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to come and help her in the kitchen. Our Lord tells her that her distractions have made her miss the good thing about his time with them.

There are only a few biblical texts that focus on the discipleship of women. Martha diligently fulfills the culturally expected role for women. The Greek term used in verse 40 of today's reading to describe this is *diakoneo*, and it is often employed with the noun *diakonia*; in Luke-Acts this refers to the preparation of food and to table service. It can also mean service and ministry in a broader sense of the word. The root word gives us the noun deacon, and our deacons fill an important role in the life of our church. The act of being hospitable is not being critiqued in this passage. There are long-standing traditions concerning hospitality that are recorded in the 18th chapter of the book of Genesis. Abraham and Sarah received the three visitors to their tent, welcoming them and providing a good meal. Martha expected the same behavior from her sister, rather than having Mary sitting at Jesus' feet while she was busy preparing what they were going to serve for dinner.

Jesus approves of Mary's transgression of the socially accepted norms for women. Whoa! Jesus was actually championing Mary's act of defiance, even though she was clearly violating a social boundary that relegated women to the margins of society. The Lord allowed her to remain seated at his feet like a disciple. In Luke's Gospel we are reminded that the teachings of Jesus are meant for everyone, both men and women alike. The English translation of the Bible that we read this morning offers a view that seems as though Jesus is pitting one sister's choice against the other. When we read verse 42, it states the following: "there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part." Theologian John Shea draws our attention to the translation of the Greek that tells us that the word should be read as "good" and not "better". In that, our theological understanding is that Mary has chosen to be connected to God who is the power

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source and initial point of our Christian action. How then are you and I called to respond to God's message in the world today? Please allow me to offer three spiritual nuggets for us to consider as we engage the text.

The first thing that we glean from this passage is that we must continue to learn about God and the teachings of Jesus Christ, so that we may remain connected to the source of love, life, energy, and motivation for service in the name of our Triune God. The wonderful thing about Georgetown Presbyterian Church is that many avenues for learning are offered here. There are the worship services in which the Word of God is preached, as well as the opportunities to engage in Bible study both online and in person, and the daily lectionary for each week that is available in the Top 5 email and in the bulletin. The first spiritual nugget is to continue to learn about God.

Our second spiritual nugget is that of hospitality. We learned from Pastor Jessica about the radical hospitality that the Samaritan man showed the Jewish man who had been robbed, beaten, and left to die on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. The Samaritan not only dressed the man's injured limbs, but he also took him to an inn and paid for his care during his convalescence. Christ invites you to consider everyone as your neighbor. In what ways do you live out the call to be hospitable to those around you? Do you make sure that you greet the people who are visiting the church and invite them to Punch Bunch? Do you take the time to engage in friendly conversation with the concierge of your building or ask the Uber and Lyft drivers who pick you up for a ride to your destination of choice how you might pray for them?

Beloved, Jesus invites us to learn about God and to serve God by being hospitable to one another. Our third spiritual nugget is that we are to join each other as disciples of Jesus Christ to

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tear down and dismantle the physical and social barriers that impose injustice by restricting, oppressing, and marginalizing people. We Christians are to stand up against societal norms and work to conquer poverty that manifests itself in an increasing population of people experiencing homelessness and hunger.

In thinking about going against societal norms, I remember that several years ago, my mother received a letter from my cousin's wife. In her writing, she described the very difficult pregnancy that she had endured. She was bed-ridden and had to rely on her husband not only to provide for them, but to also take care of the household chores. She thanked my mother for insisting that the boys in the family also learn how to cook because she enjoyed gourmet meals and delicately presented desserts all during her complicated pregnancy. My cousin's wife suggested that her husband should consider opening a restaurant, thanks to his Aunt Ceciwa.

Beloved, the story of the two sisters is no longer seen as a dichotomy of Martha, the one who does work around the house and Mary, the one who sits and learns about God at the feet of Jesus. The Lord is teaching us that the model for discipleship is to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. It is one in which we are to engage our Christian calling on a two-legged Gospel: one that learns about God and the other that would have us act in a manner that clearly identifies us as disciples of Jesus. We are each invited to be both Martha *and* Mary. I invite you all to put on your spiritual toque or chef's hat and prepare your best for Christ.

Blessing, and honor and glory and power be unto the one who sits upon the throne, and to the lamb. Forever and ever, amen.