

“Exit Ramps”

(Luke 10:38-42)

It was on a summer vacation to South Dakota that my family had taken the exit ramp to a roadside park for a picnic lunch. The sign had advertized ‘hours of family fun’ and was a bit overstated. The metal slide sitting out in the sun was a yelping two hundred degree which my bare legs felt the full brunt of the first...and last time I went down. The rusty merry-go-round was a full upper body workout to go negative five miles per hour as my brother and I shouted to my dad to ‘go faster’. And then there was this plastic Godzilla inspired gorilla, that the park planners thought would be a Kodak moment to have kids climb a this shaky metal staircase to sit or lay on the hand like twenty...okay may five feet off the ground as your parents snapped a picture. My parents have video of me, while there is no sound, but I am pretty sure I am saying, ‘get me down’. Exit ramps in life take us off the path, off the course of our GPS guided destination. Exit ramps lead us to a new and different destination. Sometimes we take exit ramps on the spur of the moment, as something piques our interest. Sometimes we take exit ramps for fluid relief reasons. Sometimes we take exit ramps to rest.

Jesus, at this point in Luke’s overall narrative, is on a road trip. At the end of chapter nine Luke says Jesus ‘set his face to go to Jerusalem’ (vs. 51). He sets his sights on Holy Week. Along the journey, traveling the dusty road that still bore the footprints of the seventy who he sent ahead to villages, Jesus keeps taking exit ramps. He keeps stopping. Last week, he pulled over to talk to a scholar of religious law about what it meant to love God and told a parable of a Samaritan neighbor. Even as the closing words of that parable, ‘go and do likewise’ lingered in the air, Jesus and his disciples get back ‘on their way’ to Jerusalem; no more than a few feet down the path, Jesus takes an exit ramp. It’s like traveling with kids.

This time the exit ramp leads to the home of Martha. Jesus knocked on her door and we are told she ‘welcomed’ him. Perhaps, as she had welcomed two of the seventy that Jesus had sent out. Find verse thirty nine with me, “She had a sister named Mary, who sat, where, at the Lord’s feet. And what does she do? She listens to what he was saying. But, there is another valid way we could translate this verse that might break open this familiar passage for us to breathe in a new way today. Verse 39 might be translated, “She had a sister named Mary who **also** sat at the Lord’s feet.” Also, small word, but it might change how the movie version of this passage plays out in our imaginations. Usually, we picture Martha frantically finishing the kosher lamb shanks and fretting over the mint jelly. We picture Martha in the kitchen, Mary in the living room. We picture Martha racing around to “Flight of the Bumblebee” symphony and when the camera cuts to Mary cue Pachelbel’s Canon in D Major. Yet, what if Luke’s intention and Luke is the only Gospel to tell this exit ramp scene, what if in Luke’s imagination Martha and Mary are sitting side by side? The word ‘also’ adds a new dimension. That shifts my imagination as well. Martha shifted uncomfortably as laundry lists of things she should do, ought to do, and all that she could be doing roamed restlessly within her. Martha tried to catch Mary’s eye to give here that look. You know the look a loved one gives you that communicates ‘help me now or face the

consequences later' without ever saying one word. Martha was there in body at Jesus' feet, but she was distracted.

Ever feel that way in church? Our minds take exit ramps as we gather here immersed and awash in words. That 'mint jelly' phrase a few moments ago, that could have awoken a reminder that you need jelly next time you go to the store and oh did Woodman's have the bread you like on sale? Our minds latch onto bits and pieces as we try to listen to someone else, especially when that someone else is granted and given the privilege of occupying ten to twelve minutes of an hour service. Our minds can process words faster than someone can say them and so we end up with that leftover brain energy that we can either use to formulate a response or take an exit ramp to somewhere else or listen for God moving in-between.

Being distracted is not a new problem, taking an exit ramp when we find ourselves in the presence of the sacred still happens to us. I don't think there are easy answers or simple four step solutions to notice or pay better attention to God's movement in our lives. We can practice such openness and awareness of who is around us. But it takes effort and results are not instantly noticeable or even necessarily guaranteed. Trying to be open to God's guidance and presence whether we are on the road or at a rest stop is fraught with both miscues and moments when we are keenly aware of God's love enfolding us. Part of what we miss sometimes in this rich narrative of Martha and Mary is the poignant moment when Jesus called Martha by name. And he did so not just once, but twice. Too often, I think we hear Jesus speaking Martha's name with disappointment. But, what if, in speaking her name Jesus was able to do so with a compassion and grace that we feel when a loved one calls us by name? There are moments when I find myself distracted or worried or caught up in trying to keep control. Moments when my words are short and I radiate anxiety. And sometimes all it takes is having someone say "Wes" and upon hearing my name, remembering God's baptismal claim upon me, that I am jolted and called back to whose I am.

So, as you travel life's road this week, notice when you are called by name. If you find your mind spinning or swirling with too many distractions, consider how you might practice listening for God's still speaking voice. When you find yourself intentionally or unintentionally on an exit ramp, try becoming aware of God's guidance and presence in that moment. And if you happen to see a plastic gorilla at a playground, just walk away.

May God bless you and keep you this week out on the road. May God's presence move in such a way you can sense the holy. And may you encounter God's love in ordinary ways that fill you with peace. Thanks be to God. Amen.