

Some Friday mornings I go to the lounge. I look out the windows. I pray, I think. It is sermon writing time and I am pondering how to begin.

This past Friday morning this is what I saw: Gulls soaring. A strong wind was coming off the lake – the sky was blue with white fluffy clouds and the gulls were soaring. And a hawk as well – just riding the currents of the wind. High, high in the sky where there are no scraps of garbage to fight over – no feast of dying fish floating toward them. Now the hawk was hunting, I think. I think hawks are always hunting. But the gulls were just enjoying the day as far as I could tell. Just enjoying the effortless ride on the wind and the day and life.

Like Mary sitting at Jesus feet and listening to what he had to say. His words to Mary were not so important that Luke has told us what they were. Martha, who is clearly the host for she has welcomed Jesus into her home, Martha was distracted by her many tasks. Luke does not tell us what they were but we can well imagine. Maybe Jesus showed up unexpectedly and the morning's wash needed to be collected from all the places it was drying. Or maybe she had been mixing and kneading bread dough. Fixing a special lunch for Jesus – setting the table – carrying the extra water needed from the well – I get the impression that her busyness had something to do with Jesus' visit. She was distracted by her many tasks.

Ever happen to you? Ever have three more things to get done today than you have time to do? Or thirty-three? Right then someone shows up unexpectedly. And Mary is just soaring in the blue sky listening to Jesus.

“Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.”

At this very moment there are people down on the Gulf Coast patching together homes and clearing garbage and debris long overdue for clearing who must be crying out to Jesus, “Lord do you not care that so many of your people are sitting at your feet in air-conditioned comfort while we wear ourselves out day and night, month after month, to rebuild after Katrina?”

Somewhere in Avon Lake a woman is wondering how Jesus followers can be hearing about loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself and yet no one comes to help her pay bills that are overwhelming.

Maybe in this room is someone who is wondering when some of the other people here will start to do their fair share in this congregation. Maybe he thinks I should be laying down the law today condemning those who sit and listen but never do.

But Jesus answered, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted about many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part which will not be taken away from her.”

I bet Martha really liked hearing that! “If that is how it is I hope you will enjoy cold baked beans for lunch – right out of the can – then no one will have to do dishes.”

Luke never tells us how Martha responded. Did she put it all aside and listen? Did she bear a grudge? Did she go on with her work with a stone in her heart?

I thought about beginning this sermon with a discussion of ping pong and golf. Ping pong where every shot after the serve is a response to the shot the opponent has made. He hits his shot softly – near the net – and I scramble to reach it – trying to return it to a place on the table he will have difficulty reaching. His shot is high and results in a big bounce and I slam it with all my might. His shot to me is a hard slam and I try to get it back to him in any way I can.

With golf it is different – I can plan my shot – the ball stays still – I am the one responsible for where the ball lies.

Jesus is most always playing ping pong in his ministry. That day at Martha’s home he did not tee up a discussion about the merits of working and the merits of listening to Jesus. His words are not a planned lecture but a response to the question Martha has made. It might not be helpful to think that Jesus is encouraging floating on the air currents – and discouraging those who are busy with the hard work of the church or helping the neighbor. Martha wanted Jesus to make Mary do something. Jesus refused.

I do not think Jesus is ever interested in our judgements or our complaints about our neighbors. Jesus did not attack Martha for her busyness but when she went on the attack he defended Mary.

This morning's gospel might lead each of us to do some thinking about how we complain about our neighbors. Jesus will not join in on our complaint. If that day Mary had complained about Martha making too much commotion maybe Jesus would have spoken a sharp word to her.

In the first letter to the Corinthians Paul says that we are the body of Christ. Just as the parts of the body do not all do the same thing so it is with Christ's body. Some of us do a lot of sitting at Jesus feet. Some fold and assemble newsletters, some fix things that are broken around here, other mow the law, some visit people in prison, some offer their time in praying for those in need. Each has a function in the body of Christ.

But remember – no comparing – no complaining.

Just giving thanks as I am sure Jesus and Mary did for the food that was served that day. .