

A Disordered Heart

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[0 : 00] All right, here we are, St. John's. We're at St. John's and we're in the middle of a hospitality series. In fact, we are week five into six weeks on a series on hospitality. We've talked about a lot of stuff. We talked about at the beginning how God is inherently hospitable because God is Trinity. God is a community within himself, so it's like ontologically hospitable. God is continually inviting the other internally and externally inviting us into the life of God.

Now, that's as much as I'll say about that because I think at any point when you're talking about the Trinity, you're this far from heresy, so that's where I'll leave that. But God is hospitable, I think, by definition. The gospel is hospitable by definition. We also looked at things like just basic commandments. In Hebrews 13, for example, it just says be hospitable, that we extend the welcome of God to other people. So we should be welcoming people. We should be welcoming people into our lives and into our homes. We looked at hospitality as a motif that the Bible uses to explain the message of the gospel. Now, tonight, here's what we're looking at.

How do you, well, how do we show hospitality to Christ? That's a very interesting question, isn't it? How do we be hospitable to Christ? So the story tonight is basically about this. You've got this woman who tries really hard to be welcoming to Christ and to show them hospitality, and it goes completely sideways. So let's get into it. There's a lot to learn in the story. It's a wonderful story.

Bit of context first. So the gospel of Luke, you could probably split the gospel of Luke in half chapter 9. And at chapter 9, Jesus is doing signs and wonders. And then at chapter 9, Jesus begins his journey to the cross. Or we could say Jesus begins his journey to heaven, and that happens, and he has to go through the cross. So we're at the beginning of that journey, and he's literally actually on a journey. So he's in this town called Bethany, and he pops into the home of Mary and Martha. And he knows this family. Jesus knows his family. This is Mary and Martha.

He loves these guys. This is the sisters of Lazarus. He knows these people. But what do you do when God comes to your house? And there's a couple of different responses here. Martha thinks she knows what to do. She breaks out of the finest china, gets busy making a huge feast, nothing but the best for Jesus. And as she's beginning to make her preparations, she noticed that Mary is not helping her. Mary's not with her in the kitchen there. And I don't know, but I wonder if you've ever been in a situation, maybe you have, where you want somebody to help you, but you're kind of passively aggressively sort of do it. I don't know, maybe that's, maybe that's just my family, but you're kind of like, you know, I'm like doing something. Oh, my wife is doing something, and I'm in the kitchen. And, you know, you hear the cupboards banging really loudly, sort of like talking, persons talking to themselves. I can't find the moussaka. I wonder where it is. It's by myself.

[3 : 22] Trying to find the tabbouleh. I don't know, I made that up. That probably didn't happen, but she obviously is angry with Mary. She pops her head around the corner, and she sees Mary doing nothing. Absolutely nothing, she thinks. Sitting down there, all cozy. I'm making the stuff, the kebabs, everything. So Martha stomps on in, and I know nothing about Middle Eastern food, by the way. Just, I made those words up. I don't even know where that comes from.

But, so Martha, you know, Martha stomps in, and gives Jesus a piece of her mind, and Jesus basically says to her, your heart is disordered. And then through his words, speaks to her, wonderfully speaks to her, and Christ graciously reorders, reorders her heart. That's sort of the gist of the story here of Mary and Martha. But we'll dig a little bit deeper here. So I described her heart as disorder, and I stole that phrase from Augustine, who lived a long time ago.

Anyway, he said, he said, he said, all of sin, this is a great line, all of sin is disordered love. All of sin is disordered love. And this is what I think he means here. He's saying, it's not so much that we want the wrong things, it's that we want them in the wrong order sometimes. We want them in the wrong amounts. For example, we love our work more than our family, for example. Or, I was at a restaurant the other day, and there was a big, there was a group booking, you know, like 15 people sitting on one of those long tables that were clearly a group. Every single person was on their phone, looking down on their phone. These people loved whatever, candy crush, whatever it was, more than the person opposite them. So disordered love means that our priorities are out of whack in our hearts. So primary things, big stuff, becomes secondary. Secondary stuff becomes really, really important, becomes important things. And I think this is what happens to Martha.

In her mind, feeding Jesus was more important than listening to Jesus. Her heart was disordered. Things were out of whack. And how did this disordered heart affect Martha? How did this disordered heart present itself in the story? Well, firstly, the passage says that she was distracted by many things, right? So the secondary thing became a primary thing. I mean, God's in your house, literally in your house. And you think the best thing to do is to cook at that point.

Now, why could she possibly think that? I mean, she wanted to do something for Jesus, I guess. And it can be very easy for us to get into a place in our spiritual life where our worth is tied up in what we do for Jesus. She wants to do something for Jesus. And so this meal becomes this, feels sort of compulsively urgent to her. More important than hearing Jesus' words.

[6 : 54] And there's lots of examples in our lives of this kind of stuff, but it can actually have a selfish root, actually. This desire, this, I need to do this for Jesus. They can actually have a selfish root to it. And it's deceptive, right? Because it's selfishness that deceptively looks like, unselfishness. So it's kind of tricky to describe. I'll sort of, maybe I'll give you an example.

In the kind of work I do, you could be involved in everything, you know. You could be like a minister. I'm only using this as an example because this is all I know, right? But you could be, you could be involved in every ministry in the church. You've got your finger in every pie. And it looks really servant-hearted. Like it looks fantastic. The optics are fantastic.

But the reasoning can be actually this. The reasoning can be, if I'm not there, it's just going to fall apart. Because, you know, because I'm pretty awesome and I want to show Jesus how awesome I am.

I remember I used to run Ecclesia, which is the young adults group at St. John's. I used to run that for a while. And sort of pre-Christmas, I got together with my leadership team and I said, well, here's when we'll come back and do our first Ecclesia meeting next year. It was like whatever it was, January 20. And I said, well, we'll start at January 20 because that's when I get back from vacation. And someone said, well, we could start before you get back.

And I'm like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. That's obviously, I didn't say it, but that's obviously what my face said to her. And this is what she said to me. She said, you're acting as if we need you.

[8 : 49] Which was quite awkward, obviously. See, a disordered heart makes you think it's all about you and it's all about what you are doing for Jesus. Martha's heart was disordered. Now, how else did this disordered heart affect her? Well, say it like this. How would you know if your heart was disordered?

Well, another symptom is that we doubt God's love. I mean, Martha says these painful words to Jesus in verse 40. Lord, do you not care? Lord, don't you care? When it's more important to do things for Christ than it is to be with Christ, you're always going to doubt his love for you because you can't outdo Jesus. And so you're always going to feel insecure about God's love for you.

Another symptom of a disordered heart. You get irritable with people who don't, you know, get with the program. So Martha's kind of grumpy at her sister, Mary, and at Jesus. I mean, she's doing all the work and no one else is helping her out and she's probably thinking, come on, people. Come on.

When your heart is disordered, you can be tempted to think that, I mean, you're doing it all, so you're pretty great. But the people who aren't doing much, well, they're a bit useless, aren't they?

They're kind of just ballast, really. They're just kind of, they're less. They're less than. I mean, it can be like, you can have like a real, this wonderful passion for service or mission or something, whatever it is. But if in that passion you're looking down on other people because they're not passionate about it, it reveals like a me-centeredness in your life. I mean, look what Martha says, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to serve me.

[11 : 06] So her question is, it's not really about serving Jesus, it's all about serving Martha. She's trying to win his support for her stuff, for her gig, for her plan, for her agenda. She's trying to engage Jesus in her thing rather than submitting to his. It's not like, Jesus, help me to help you. Help me. Have you helped me? I can help you. No, it's just help me.

So a disordered heart, one, has a misplaced identity. It's all about doing, doing, doing. A disordered heart doubts the love of God, and a disordered heart, it can cause you to get overly anxious and sort of upset about the performance of other people.

So how does Jesus reorder Martha's heart? Well, first, with tenderness and love. It's beautiful. He says her name twice, and there's nothing throwaway here, you know.

As if answering a question, her question is, do you love me? He says, Martha, Martha. She's tried to coerce him. She's got angry with him, and he reorders her heart by just loving her, being very tender with her. You know, Martha, you're completely off kilter here, but I still love you. You're wonderful. I find that very reassuring. What else does Jesus do here? He names what's going on for her. He names what's happening in her heart. He exposes her. He says, you are anxious, and you are troubled by many things. And I think there is a warning in this. In the parable of the sower, you know the parable of the sower. It's the parable that Jesus tells as these seeds fall to the ground, and some of them fall on nice soil, and they grow up, and some of them fall on rocky, and they don't really grow. Some of them fall on pretty good soil, but there's thorns and stuff.

Right, that one there, the thorny one, there, Luke 8. So this is not much before this. In explaining the parable, Jesus says this. He says that people who fall on the soil where the thorns are are choked by the cares of this world. The cares of this world. Cares, that's the same Greek word here as anxious. I think Jesus is warning her. He's saying, don't keep living like this. If you keep living like this, trying to like just sort of, you know, serve me, but not listen to me. If you take away the source of that vision for service, you're going to die spiritually. You'll never mature, and that's what happens to those seeds that fall into thorny ground. They grow up, but they never mature. So Jesus loves her. He names what's happening to her, and then he refocuses her.

[14 : 00] And he says that with just this great line. He says, one thing is necessary. One thing is necessary, and he points to Mary. And what's Mary been doing? Mary's been sitting at the feet of Jesus.

And it's a very important detail, this sitting at the feet of Jesus. Again, there's not much throwaway stuff here. We can, I haven't seen a painting of this, but I imagine you could imagine a painting of her sitting at the feet. And it could be, we could sort of romanticize it a bit, like she's this kind of doe-eyed fan, or she's kind of swooning at Jesus' feet. Oh, this is so cool.

No, the sitting at the feet is the posture of a disciple, is the posture of a student at the feet, humbling themselves at the feet of a rabbi. She was a disciple. She wanted to hear his words.

She was desperate to hear his words. She knew that was the source of life. What was Mary doing? She was doing the most important thing in the house that day, listening to Jesus.

Back to the very first question we asked in the sermon, and I'm finishing fairly quickly here, is how do you show hospitality to Christ? By attending to his words.

[15 : 15] You put yourself at the feet of Jesus. You do that before you go about trying to serve Christ. Let me conclude. Like I've said, a bit of a summary here. We know our hearts are out of whack when we're anxious about how we're performing for God.

We know our hearts are out of whack when we're overly concerned about other people's performance for God. We know our hearts are out of whack when we question God's love for us. And the solution to this, the solution is being at the feet of Christ, hearing Christ's words for us.

It will reorder our heart, and it will give vision and proper motivation to the stuff we actually do in serving Christ. Let me finish with an illustration here.

Queen Elizabeth was crowned in 1953. And so the coronation is sort of a Church of England ceremony. And at some point she's given a scepter.

What a scepter is, it's like a rod, it's encrusted, it's got a thing on the end, it's like a symbol of power. And it's got a diamond on the top that's like a fist.

[16 : 31] It's called the Great Star of Africa. So it's a flawless diamond, it's 500 carats. To put that in perspective, when I got engaged, my wife said to me, I don't want anything big for an engagement ring.

Nothing big, please. Something understated. And you know what, I really took that to heart. And her diamond ring, it's beautiful, like it's like 100 years old.

The carrot rating is zero, puts it straight away, you know, it's pretty small, 0.16 carats. So this diamond, it's lovely, like you can see it, like it's totally, you can see the diamond.

This diamond on the top of the scepter is, I think, I guess it's 3,000 times the size of my wife's beautiful engagement ring.

It's worth about \$400 million, this ring. Despite the value of the scepter, I mean, and she's got, she's wearing a billion dollars worth of stuff at this point, right?

[17 : 39] The thing, right? Despite the value of all the stuff, there's something in the ceremony that's said to be worth more, worth more money. Partway through the coronation, she's handed a Bible.

Bible. And the moderator, the person presiding over the coronation, says these words, and I quote, to keep your majesty ever mindful of the law and the gospel of God as the rule for the whole life and government of Christian princes.

We present you with this book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is wisdom. This is the royal law. These are the lively oracles of God.

Isn't that wonderful? Well, folks, God's words are a treasure to us. We must be under them corporately, which is why preaching out of the Bible is so central to the work we do here at St. John's to our community.

We also must be under it personally. You must have time with Jesus. I'm not going to tell you how to do that. I'm not going to give you a formula. I use an app on my phone called Bible Gateway if it's helpful to know.

[18 : 50] The quietest time of my day is on the bus ride to work and back. So that's when I am in the Word. But you need to work that out for yourself. Time to hear Christ's words because they are a treasure, a source of life.

That's the best thing we can do. Amen.