

“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things.” There is a powerful message for us in these words. How have we let anxiety, or worry, or fear keep us from responding to the call of the Lord in our own lives?

Our scriptures are full of stories about how God was alive and active in the lives of people. Our faith tells us that God has been intimately involved in the lives of people since the beginning of time. But, somehow, we tend to forget that God is still alive and active in the world today, in fact in our very own lives. It is easy to get so busy with living that we fail to recognize the presence of God in our own lives. I’m dating myself here, but a few years ago there was a popular song that included the words “Don’t worry – be happy!” That is essentially what Jesus is telling us. Relax and live life and just do the right thing.

Last Sunday, we heard the parable of the Good Samaritan, where we were challenged to love God with all our heart and soul and to love our neighbor as ourselves. In so doing, we embrace discipleship; we live the gospel values to which we are called. The priest and Levite were so focused on their own issues, that they failed to be present to a person in need. Were they necessarily bad people? No. While they professed to be disciples, they failed the true test of discipleship. It was the stranger, the Samaritan, who got busy and did something. All through the gospels Jesus stresses that discipleship is a question of not only hearing God’s word, but also putting it into practice in the concrete circumstances of lives.

Sometimes there is more than meets the eye in the people whom we encounter. Countless numbers of people come in and out of our lives, and most pass anonymously, but sometimes someone will say something that we need to hear or touch us in a profound way that opens our eyes in a new and powerful way. Is it coincidental? I don’t think so — situations that appear to be coincidental are often God’s way of remaining anonymous.

In our first reading, Abraham encountered three travelers who were tired and in need of rest. His faith stressed the importance of hospitality and when he opened his home to the strangers, when he was present to their needs, he had an encounter with God. It was after he welcomed them that God revealed that he and Sarah would have a child. The long-awaited heir was finally to be realized.

The three visitors that Abraham encountered were angels – Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael. How many times in our own lives have we unknowingly encountered angels? The word “angel” means “messenger from God” and often the people whom we encounter do have messages to deliver, even if they themselves are unaware of it. It is in being present to one another, to people from every walk of life, that we open ourselves to an encounter with God. Discipleship is about not only hearing God’s word, but also putting God’s word into practice in our lives. When we are truly present to people, we can listen with our hearts as well as our ears.

Our gospel story today immediately follows the Good Samaritan parable and needs to be understood in that same context. At first glance, it would be easy to side with Martha and her irritation. Mary did not seem concerned with her sister’s hard work, for she was totally focused on Jesus and His teachings. But this story is not about Martha or Mary. It is about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

At that period in history in which this story was written, there was a controversy regarding the role of women in the church. With this story, Luke waded into the controversy. Many biblical scholars indicate that Martha represented those in society who were opposed to women having an active role in leadership of the newly emerging Christian communities. They wanted women to focus on the home and allow men to lead the church. Mary, on the other hand, represented the other faction who welcomed women into leadership, into full discipleship. After calming Martha, Luke presents Jesus as giving his blessing on her ministry and affirming that God has called all people, men and women, saint and sinner, people from every walk of life, to answer the call of discipleship in their own ways.

The challenge for us is to not get caught up in all the drama life presents to us. When we know and heed God’s word, we become faithful disciples. As we move forward this week, I encourage you to reflect on this story, as well as the story of the Good Samaritan, and discern how God is calling you to discipleship. What does it mean to you to be a disciple of Jesus? What areas in your life are preventing you from hearing God’s word and putting it into practice in your daily life?