

As Far as it Depends on You
Luke 10:38-42
Rev. Valerie Fairchild

Let us pray
Lord, open our hearts to hear your Word for us
today. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

I really appreciate the Mary and Martha story. It has multiple lessons in just a few short verses. Today I want to look at Martha's tension concerning her perception of Mary's behavior. She saw one picture – Mary was leaving all the work to her.

Mary and Martha were hosting a dinner at their home. Granted it was a surprise dinner. Jesus and the disciples did not use their cell phones to call ahead for reservations. Imagine the call, "Hey, Martha, we thought we'd make it all the way to Jerusalem before stopping to eat, but we were held up when an expert of the law asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, and Jesus had to stop and tell a story about a good Samaritan. You know how he is. Could we eat at your house tonight?" Instead, they dropped in unexpectedly. And in the middle of this sweet gathering Martha was stressed out.

Many of you will be gathered around the table of family or friends, some of you hosting,

some of you as guests, this Thanksgiving and Christmas. Sadly, many will find these family gatherings stressful. In fact, there are increased domestic violence calls to police officers on these two days.

I remember one year feeling so stressed trying to please both John's and my families, neither of which felt we spent enough time with them, and trying to figure out how we could enjoy just our own little foursome for part of it, that I was ready to call off the whole holiday! We really don't want to pull away or drive family away.

Consider Paul's advice to the Roman church, **"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."** (Romans 12:18) As we grow in our walk with Jesus, we are to grow as peace makers.

I've watched, and heard about, conflict in both home families and church families and I've noticed something that I think will help. Recognize that *we really don't need to impose our behavior codes on others*. Because of the similarities, I will jump back and forth between church and home families and what we can learn from each.

Our church makeup mimics many family gatherings. We are multigenerational. We are from different ethnicities. (It is more and more common for families to be more than one ethnicity.) We are from different faith backgrounds and different

political backgrounds. Each of these has its own understood behavior codes. *We really don't have to impose our behavior codes on others.*

We used to have a gentleman who dressed in suit coat and tie for every worship here at Spirit Song. He is a wonderful, strong believer in Christ, and committed to serving. Both his ethnic background and his faith background require a man to wear a suit coat and tie in church. He used to go up to the men during fellowship time and let them know they were not honoring God with their manner of dress. I wonder at times if we lost any guests or new men who were taken aback.

We really don't need to impose our behavior codes on others.

In this church, we chuckle now about the idea of requiring suit coat and tie, but in other churches and cultures, it is an expectation. What expectations do we try to impose on others?

Our son-in-law wears his 49-er ball cap all the time, indoors and out. This is a trend that is becoming more common. I know this bothers some people. But I choose to focus on what I believe is more important. He loves my daughter and he is a great dad with his children. Who cares about the hat? In fact, in the early church, heads were supposed to be covered. So, when you see a hat in church, just think, "That man must be a traditionalist."

We really don't need to impose our behavior codes on others.

Child rearing is a huge challenge. Every parent has heard from the generation before that they are not raising their children 'right.' I don't care what age you are, the generation before you didn't like the way you raised your kiddos. And comments about our child rearing choices can be very hurtful.

Our grand children are not disciplined the way we did. But they aren't supposed to be! Much has changed since we raised ours. I pray for parents raising children today with all the stuff of the world. John and I choose to watch our children parent their children and observe what they do and then we try to mimic their approaches. And it is different in our son's house from our daughter's house. But, hey, they are their children. Our job, our most important focus, is to love on our grandkids and build them up as children loved by God.

One church my husband served had begun a new service that attracted young families with children. One day an adult from the church came and complained about finding gum on the sidewalk and said it must be from the children coming on the grounds. The next Sunday, John preached a sermon called, "*Thank God for the Gum.*" He encouraged the people to rejoice that another generation of

kiddos was being raised up to know God and when they saw gum, or a dropped Sunday school paper, or spilled punch, to give God thanks for bringing children to their church and giving the adults the opportunity to demonstrate God's love.

Dress codes, children's behavior...and what about theological differences?

In this church we serve children and nonmembers Holy Communion as United Methodists always have. We believe learning and understanding Communion takes a lifetime. It begins with understanding that Jesus love us, and Communion is a gift representing his love. We believe, as in the story of Luke 24, that people, even children, come to know God's presence in the receiving of Communion. In our church, no one is barred from the table because we don't want to bar anyone from God's presence. Who is to say what God will do in that holy moment?

Many of you are from denominations that do not serve young children or nonmembers. So, how do we handle that? We follow the codes of the house of worship we attend. Families can choose to let their children participate in Communion or wait until they are older. However, those who serve Communion must choose to honor the church's practice and lovingly serve all children, nonmembers and guests.

Likewise, some family homes will have faith observances that differ from yours. Some say grace, some observe other practices. You need not participate when it goes against your code, but you do need to be respectful and quiet.

When my niece married, she was exploring Buddhism. At the end of the ceremony the couple did some ritual with a figurine burning incense and chanting to the north, south, east and west. I respectfully watched. A wedding is not the time to bring up faith differences nor is the holiday table. Now, I did pray silently she'd come to know Christ one day and as of two years ago, she has chosen to follow Jesus! Don't underestimate prayer!

Many families will have fights about things like dress codes, children's behavior, theological and political differences, who is helping and who is not, who contributed to the meal and who didn't, and numerous other issues. Some of those fights will result in family members pulling away and choosing not to speak to one another or choosing not to celebrate holidays together any more.

How many people will wish they hadn't felt it necessary to impose their behavior codes on another? How many will wish they'd operated under **"as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."**?

Church families and families of related persons are not very different. Jesus told Martha,

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things...” (Luke 10:41) I don’t believe he was scolding her.

Repeating her name sounds like he was entreating her, so wanting her to understand the bigger picture. He was aware of the many things that bothered her. He was sorry she was upset.

Jesus added, **“But few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”** (Luke 10:42) Mary chose to focus on Jesus and not the distractions. Where do we focus?

Do you remember the nursery rhyme, “Kitty cat, kitty cat, where have you been?” “I’ve been to London to visit the Queen.” “Kitty cat, kitty cat, what did you do there? I frightened a mouse from under her chair.”

Here’s a variance from Nicky Gumble’s Alpha Course. “Kitty cat, kitty cat, where have you been?” “I’ve been to church to see the King.” “Kitty cat, kitty cat, what did you do there?” “I stared at the pastor’s wife’s big hair.”

The cat went to see the queen and was distracted by the mouse. The cat went to church to see the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, Jesus – and was distracted by the pastor’s wife’s hair. Does that describe us? Do we come to worship God but instead notice everything else? Do we gather in

family homes to celebrate *Thanksgiving* to God or the *birth of Christ* and notice *everything else*?

Martha was distracted. Mary chose to spend time with God.

God is the focus in the church, but how about in our family settings? I believe we are called to be peace makers, representing Jesus and modeling Jesus’ love.

When John and I choose to ignore my son-in-law’s hat, we focus on who he is in Christ and we give thanks that he married our daughter. When we ignore the differences in the way our son and daughter are raising their children, we can focus on loving our grandchildren the way God does and encourage their parents by acknowledging the challenges they face in raising kiddos today. And, prayerfully, our choices will continue to make our visits fantastic and prevent any rupture in relationships.

We really don’t have to impose our behavior codes on others. **“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”** (Romans 12:18)

So, you ask, what about the very toxic person who tears everyone around them down? Hear the first part of that verse. **“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you...”** You can’t control another. Do what you can to keep the peace. Act as a buffer. Change the subject. Move to another room. Don’t

offer alcohol if an alcoholic is attending. Don't start a conversation about politics when you know it is a hot topic. *Do* invite others into conversations around positive subjects. *Do* pray God helps you see others as precious in his eyes. *Do* pray God grants you wisdom and helps you love everyone as he does.

The origin of Thanksgiving comes from two very diverse peoples coming together; the Native Americans and the European pilgrims. Talk about differences in faith practices, clothing, behavior, eating habits, language, etc.! Yet they celebrated together. The Native Americans may not have understood God, but they did understand the loving, respectful, inclusive hospitality they were offered. The pilgrims understood the importance of focusing on their gratitude to God and the Native Americans.

This congregation models the ability to pull together great diversity in the name of Jesus – with the focus on his love. May your Thanksgiving and all your home gatherings focus on being Jesus' peacemakers and creating positive memories for all!

Let us pray
Lord, help us to be your peacemakers. Help us to interact with family in friends in ways that model you and your love. Thank you, Lord. Amen.