



July 17, 2022

## Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*The Lord appeared to Abraham by the terebinth of Mamre as he sat  
at the entrance to his tent... –Genesis 18:1*



Dear Friends,

We meet Jesus in everyone around us, and it isn't always convenient. Often, we only try to meet him on our terms. Today's readings ask us to adjust our priorities. If we are open to the interruptions, we may find that it is God to whom we are offering hospitality and loving-kindness

In the biblical world of the Near East there are two kinds of care that people are obligated to extend to others. One is hospitality, and the other is "Loving-kindness" (in Hebrew "*Hesed*"). Hospitality is the moral obligation that must be shown to strangers. *Hesed* is the obligation that we owe to family and friends. Our first reading, from Genesis, shows us the exuberant hospitality of Abraham. Our story from Luke demonstrates the *hesed* (loving-kindness) of Martha and Mary.

In the heat of the afternoon Abraham is sitting at his tent and enters a trance-like state. He sees three strangers. He knows the nomadic law which demands that hospitality be proffered to strangers lest they die in the desert. He runs out to meet the strangers. His generosity mirrors the generosity of God. Three measures of flour are about 60 pounds—before adding the water. The steer to be slaughtered and prepared, probably weighed 1200 pounds. This was going to be a lengthy visit. And he did not hold back on the precious water to wash their feet. In the end the strangers are turned into friends who promise Abraham and Sarah the blessing of a child in their old age.

What Martha and Mary offer Jesus is not hospitality but *hesed*. They already know and love Jesus, he is a friend. This story is unique to the Gospel of Luke. It parallels a story in Acts of the Apostles written by the same author. In Acts as the community of disciples grows, the leaders stretched too thin cannot attend to feeding the community and preaching the word. So, the community chooses seven "deacons" to do the table service. This frees the apostolic leaders to preach. The community needed both ministries, service and proclaiming the word.

When we hear the story, the translation reads that Mary "*chose the better part.*" But Luke quotes Jesus as saying, "*Mary has chosen the good part.*" Following the story of the Good Samaritan (we heard last week) it does not make sense that Jesus is suggesting that preaching the word has absolute priority over serving people. Luke describes Martha's service as diaconal. She is serving like Jesus served. Mary is sitting at the feet of a Rabbi, a position traditional forbidden to women. The story may represent the community trying to balance service with the proclamation of the word. It also may represent how the community was coming to terms with Christian women exercising leadership in the Church.

Considering these readings perhaps we should stop multi-tasking. Maybe we can focus on the one thing directly in front of us. Let us focus on the moment rather than dwelling on the past or future planning. Like Abraham let us rush to the peripheries to greet the stranger and discover God's blessing. Let us go to encounter those who are strangers to us—the immigrant, refugee, the LGBTQ person, the person of another culture, the woman in a crisis pregnancy, the addict or prisoner. Let us work to make all strangers friends. When we offer generous hospitality, in the end, we discover a family with whom we share the loving-kindness of Jesus.

Peace,

*Fr Ron*

*Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: [www.anne.church](http://www.anne.church)*