

“Finding Shelter – Being Shelter”
March 25th, 2007
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Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

Over the course of the last four weeks Steve and I have been talking about the importance of understanding life and faith metaphorically as a journey. Specifically we have talked about the importance of this metaphor during Lent, as we take time to reflect on our lives, on our relationship with God, and on our relationships with others. Lent is quickly drawing to a close. Next week is Palm Sunday and Holy week follows leading right up to Easter. As Lent has quickly sped by though I hope that you have been able to find some time to reflect on your relationship with God and this lifelong journey that you're on.

This morning as we continue to talk about the journey that we're on through life, I want to spend a little bit of time talking about the importance of shelter on our journey. Shelter is a vitally important part of any journey as it provides us with protection, a place to rest, and a place to regain our strength before continuing on our journey. As we talk this morning about the importance of shelter we'll look at this concept from two different angles remembering that it is not only important that we find ways to be sheltered on our journey, but also that we find ways to provide shelter for others.

First of all, there are very real and tangible ways that we find ourselves in need of shelter as we journey through life. On the last weekend of August in 2005 Eric Atlow of

Slidell, LA loaded up his family and evacuated as Hurricane Katrina approached the Gulf Coast. Even though Hurricane warnings weren't uncommon during that time of year and even though there had been calls to evacuate that had gone ignored in the past, Eric and his family left early as this particular storm approached. The officials warned that it could be worse than usual and the call to evacuate came out with a sense of urgency and necessity. As Katrina approached, Eric, his wife Bernadine, and their four children left behind their home and headed to Lafayette, LA. Eric's sister Betty, who lived next door to the Atlow's decided that she would remain behind in her home.

As many of you know it was not the rain that came with Katrina that was the most devastating for Slidell, LA. A storm surge moved across Lake Ponchartrain and brought with it a wall of water as much as 25 feet high that hit the city of Slidell. As this water moved into Slidell it brought nearly nine feet of standing water into the Atlow's neighborhood. While Eric and his family were in Lafayette to find shelter Betty found herself on the roof of her house, in need of being rescued by a neighbor with a boat.

As the water receded from their neighborhood the Atlow's returned to their home. In the days and weeks immediately following the storm Bernadine and the girls found shelter in the home of an Aunt across town. Eric and their son Brandon found shelter in a tent on their property as they learned the necessity of being present to ward off looters. After several months FEMA brought in two small trailers to place on their property and since that time the Atlow's have found shelter here. There is a very real need for us as human beings to have shelter, a place to be protected from the elements, a place to lay our heads, a place to feel secure and at home. The ease with which this need has been met in my life has led me to take it for granted in many ways. As I continue to get to

know and to hear stories of Hurricane Katrina survivors I am increasingly aware of our need for shelter and the ease in which so many of us have it in our lives.

The story of the Atlow's is not uncommon in Slidell and in others areas affected by the storm. Over the last nine months members of our congregation have been a part of rebuilding five different homes in Slidell that were impacted by hurricane Katrina and another group is going down next month. Each of these homes as well as thousands more have served and will serve again as shelter to men, women, and children just like you and me. What is so remarkable for me about the Atlow's story is what happened after they returned from the storm.

As they settled into their FEMA trailers and began to get their rebuilding coordinated with the United Methodist Committee on Relief, the Atlow's were not simply consumed by their need for shelter. They also were aware of their need to provide shelter for others and acted on this in a very tangible way. As relief teams began coming to work on their home Bernadine quit her job. She and her husband Eric both worked full time before the storm, but with groups coming to work on their home weekly they decided that Bernadine should be present to help with providing shelter for these groups. Each day that there is a group working on their home Bernadine insists on cooking lunch for the group. She is out on the worksite with the group through the course of the day offering drinks, cookies, snacks, bug spray, you name it. In a situation where so many others could become bogged down by their need for shelter Bernadine is actively seeking to meet the physical needs of others and to provide shelter in very real and practical ways.

The story of the Atlow's illustrates the physical reality of our need for shelter and also our calling to help provide shelter to one another. As we journey through life though, we have a need for shelter that is beyond merely our physical need. Our need to both have and provide shelter also exists on a different level, a level that is both spiritual and emotional. The story of Mary and Martha as it is found in the Gospel of Luke illustrates this reality in a profound way.

Hear the story as it is reported in Luke 10:38-42. "Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'"

Other than Jesus the two main characters in this story are the sisters Mary and Martha. As Jesus comes to visit, Martha is consumed by trying to provide shelter for Jesus as she scurries around the house and seeks to prepare food and drink and make sure that every last detail is attended to. Mary, reacts to Jesus' visit quite differently than her sister does. As Martha scrambles around the house frantically trying to take care of things to provide shelter for Jesus, Mary sits at Jesus' feet, soaking up all that he has to say, basking in the shelter that is provided by his presence. Martha is consumed by trying to provide shelter. Mary gets wrapped up in the shelter that Jesus provides.

Ask yourself a question this morning then. Are you more of a Mary or a Martha? Are you more concerned about going and doing and providing? Are you more focused on being nourished and strengthened and sheltered? The way that we answer these questions will greatly impact the way that we see, appreciate, and interact with others. Whether we have more Mary or Martha tendencies can impact the ways that we see the gifts of others. It is important to have some self awareness of this as we journey through life with ourselves and with one another. Let's take just a minute then to look at the lives of people who have lived as a Mary or a Martha.

My grandmother Rademaker was a Martha, symbolically speaking of course. Her name was Evelyn. Growing up we would joke about how our favorite activity at Grandma Rademaker's was recreational eating. As soon as we walked through the door of her house Grandma was always offering us food and drink. She was constantly hovering and moving through the house making sure that everyone's glasses were full, that enough snacks were out, and that everyone had enough of what they wanted to eat. Rarely would she just sit down to visit with us, she was constantly on the go, constantly seeking to provide shelter, much like Martha is in the story from Luke.

On the other hand then, a good friend that Heather and I met in Seminary always reminded me of a Mary. In our first year of Seminary we shared a lot of meals with this friend and spent a lot of time in the evenings and on the weekends in each others apartments. When we were at this friend's apartment we always knew that we could make ourselves at home. We weren't waited on hand and foot, the apartment wasn't meticulously clean, but we would sit and visit and talk and laugh and have a wonderful time enjoying one another's company. This friend wasn't so concerned about going and

doing, but was more interested in being. As we all spent time together it provided an atmosphere where we could enjoy the shelter and comfort that our friendship provided.

Now, I imagine that if Grandma Rademaker and this friend of ours had ever managed to get together or to visit one another's home they would have really stressed each other out. And my hunch is that one of them would have likely started to lament the actions of the other, just as Martha does in our story today from Luke. Martha and Grandma Rademaker were always on the go, consumed by providing shelter to others. Mary and our friend from school were more interested in sitting and being in relationship with others, in receiving the shelter that comes from supporting and nurturing friendships. Getting people like this together is the kind of stuff that definitely makes for awkward dinner parties!

As is often the case with the stories we read in scripture little pieces of ourselves are revealed in this story of Mary and Martha. Those of us who are Martha's hear this story and resonate with Martha – of course she wanted to make sure things were clean and tidy and that everyone had enough food and drink, Jesus was visiting and she wanted to be a good host. And those of us who are Mary's hear this story and resonate with her – of course she wanted to sit and learn from Jesus and be present with Jesus, what a great relational opportunity to sit and learn from a dear friend.

And as we often do as human beings when we look at this story from the perspective of our own Mary or Martha lenses we have the tendency to be judgmental and critical of people who are different. If you are a Martha I imagine you have a hard time seeing Mary simply sitting there and not helping. If you are more of a Mary I

imagine that Martha stresses you out and that you wish she's just sit down and relax and enjoy the company.

As is the case with most things on our journeys through life, the real key lies in balance. Our call is to never be fully committed to living as a Mary or a Martha, our call is to make sure that we find opportunities and ways to both provide shelter and to be sheltered as we journey through life.

Next week is Palm Sunday and we will celebrate Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem marking the beginning of Holy Week. Our Lenten journey is quickly drawing to a close. However, I hope that we have all been able to learn that our journey is truly one that should continue for all of our days. And I pray that as we continue to journey through the wilderness of our lives that we will remember the things we have learned on this Lenten journey; that the point of the journey is the journey, that we should never put a period where God would have there be a comma, that we are called to turn back to God and be renewed, and that we are to enjoy the detours. As we experience all of these different aspects of the journey I pray too that we will always find ways to get ourselves the shelter we need, to restore our souls, and refresh our spirits. At the same time I hope we'll always be able to find ways to make shelter for others, to be shoulders to cry on and good and faithful partners in the journey.