



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
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The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

27 July, 2025

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I would like to begin today by saying that one of the things I enjoy when preaching during the summer is the opportunity to linger on a theme over the course of a number of weeks. Without intending to, I have lingered a bit on the works of Tolkien and Lewis. But also, I hope to make clear today, the theme of gracious hospitality, humility, and the rightful ordering of our lives, with all good things beginning and ending in God.

Last week I had meant to close with one last idea about Martha's story, and it is this: I imagine it told in her voice as she looked back over her relationship with Jesus and the ways in which she supported his ministry.

I imagine her gently laughing at herself as she related what was true for all of them. It may have gone something like this, "Everything about Jesus was so different than anything else we had ever experienced. The way he shows up unannounced and his expectation that nothing would be spared in our welcome of his presence. His laughter at the door filled me with a sense, of "Oh boy, here we go again!". Not because he was a pain, far from it, but because he had come to interrupt our patterns of selfishness, of putting ourselves first. In the beginning, I was always so flustered by him. It isn't so much that he was unpredictable or demanding but that he was confident that we would offer to him a generous return of the gifts that we experienced in his presence, which was his all in all, poured out for us from the eternal stream of God's unending love for the world."

The we look at our Bible, we see chapter and verse numbers which came much later than the writing of the Gospels and were meant to be an aid in reading. And so, we have artificial divisions between the story of Martha's welcome, the Disciples invitation to Jesus that he teach them how to pray and his answering parable of the man who hears a late-night knock at the door. I invite you to hear instead a growing crescendo moving through these passages.

We begin with Martha's gentle, laughing self-deprecation as she recounts her Bilbo-esque welcoming of Jesus' intrusion into her home and the emptying of her larder. Following this, a little louder, we have the parable of the man woken from sleep by a loud knocking at the door, who, like Martha, gets up and produces the requested hospitality because of the persistence of the guest. A story and a parable telling us what we already know about human hospitality; we will offer it, but not without a little grumbling if we feel put out.



The loudest part of this elongated series of musical phrases begins with Jesus' words "So I say to you... "Ask, Search, Knock" Everyone who asks receives, everyone who searches finds, for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." The music gets louder when the story moves from human hospitality to Godly hospitality.

See, friends, that God is not like us. God does not count the hour of the day or consider the preparedness of the larder. God invites true heartedness and plain-spokenness of those who turn to him with outstretched hearts and hands. To those who are humble of heart God will give more than they expect, but not more than they need. To the humble and contrite spirit, God's gifts are a joyful revelation. We humans might hand out snakes and scorpions to those who are in hunger or need. I need say nothing more than to invite you to bring to mind the pictures we see of the children dying from hunger in Gaza. They stand at the door of humanity and knock, stretch out their hands, and what do they receive? The opposite of what God would have us offer to them, an utter failure of our humanity to live into divine expectation.

Snakes and scorpions are the high note of this elongated passage which begins with Martha's consternation at the impromptu dinner party and grows in intensity as we hear the dark-of-night knock at the door. Nestled like a precious jewel among these images of what it means to be generous under all circumstances is Jesus' lesson on prayer, in which we are invited to see ourselves in the one whose hand is outstretched, the one who is hungry, the one who asks for hospitality.

But please note that first, Jesus instructs us to want more than bread. That we learn to desire that God's name to be hallowed. For our actions to reflect God's glory into the world. We are to pray that before we come to the table to be fed the world sees God in us and sees the nearness of God's Kingdom. Our laboring in the fields of the Kingdom of God is what gives us the appetite for the living bread come down from heaven.

Someone asked me about the Eucharistic prayer that we use during the summer. It is Prayer C, which you can find in the prayerbook in front of you in the pews on page 369. It was written during the time of the moon landing 56 years ago, hence the Carl Sagan like vast expanse of interstellar space. It might seem a little dated to some but contained within it is something that we cannot afford to lose touch with: "Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal." Our daily bread is so much more than asking God for some kind of minimum wage to help us limp from one day to the next. Our daily bread is nothing less than Jesus Christ himself, poured out on the Cross for all the world that all may be healed and all be made one.

It may seem like the work we are given to do in this time of chaos and destruction is too much for us. However, the beauty of Martha is that it did not matter whether or not she was good enough to serve the King of Glory. The beauty is that she did it. We do not have time to wait until we are perfect before we can serve God, we will be made perfect in service to him whom to serve is our perfect freedom.