

BE THOU MY VISION
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Trinity, Ossining

The Rev. Lynn Harrington

When I was on retreat recently, I attended a workshop in which we spent the day praying and hearing beautiful meditations on the spiritual life. At the end, I was leaving the building with another woman. On her way out she commented, “*Well now- back to the real world!*”

Because I was keeping silence - I didn't respond verbally - but her remark has stuck in my mind. My response was and is - *prayer IS the real world!* This isn't!

Not too long ago, I listened to an interview of novelist William Blatty, who agreed. He said: “*This isn't the real world - heaven is! This world and the suffering in it has to do with how much of heaven you can receive.*”

Our gospel is about receiving love. It's the flip side of last week's story of the “*Good Samaritan*,” which was about “*neighbor love*.” In it we learned that God's grace often comes from the margins, the outcast—from the person whom we perceive as our enemy. We discovered that “*our neighbor*” is the person who shows mercy!

This week the “*love command*” is our focus. I remind you – it's the *first* command – from which all else flows. It commands us to love the Lord with all our heart.

Or to put it to music as our offertory hymn does so beautifully: “*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; all else be naught to me save that thou art, thou my best thought, by day or by night, waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.*”

If you leave here humming that hymn - *you'll leave here humming the gospel!* But let's back up a moment to the story: *Jesus is visiting Martha and Mary in the home they share with Lazarus, their brother.* Later, Jesus will raise His friend Lazarus from the dead.

In the story, Jesus has supper *alone* with the two women. (Lazarus is elsewhere!) *While Martha fusses in the kitchen, Mary sits at His feet and receives His teaching.*

Martha gets *chastised for being busy* and distracted. You could rename this story --- # Distracted! Mary gets *praised* for “*choosing the better part*” - which is simply to sit in Jesus' presence --- # Presence!

Some crucial points: in the first century men *didn't dine alone* with women - especially women who weren't relatives. Women *didn't* sit at the feet of teachers because women *weren't* allowed to be disciples. In biblical times and beyond... *women belonged in the kitchen - not at the feet of teachers!*

So what did Mary receive at Jesus' feet? What's “the better part” Jesus tells us to copy? Jesus' presence is “the better part.” Here's the point: Mary of Bethany received *Jesus' presence* when she sat at His feet - no fussing - no distractions. # Presence is our goal!

WE receive His presence in scripture, Eucharist, and prayer. When we receive Jesus - *we're in heaven - right now.*

Here's how this works. “*Behold, you were within me, and I outside,*” writes St. Augustine, as he wonders about all the years he spent living in an existence devoid of meaning and hope. Augustine concluded, “*My heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.*”

Like Mary, Augustine “*chose the better part*” and rested in Christ. I say: *imitate Augustine. Look within* - look TO the center of your being. Remember, *the kingdom of God is within you*. Your heavenly connection is in you!

Here’s what you need to remember: BE with Jesus on a daily basis. Find a comfortable spot. Sit quietly. Stay there and pray, “*Behold you are within me and I outside.*”

Then close your eyes and hum this love song:

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; all else be naught to me, save that thou art -
thou my best thought, by day or by night, waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.*

Amen.