



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Sunday, 17 July – Trinity 5
Readings: Genesis 18:1-10a & St Luke: 25-37
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Actions stations!

Both of the Bible readings begin with the respective host and hostess offering hospitality. In Genesis Abraham's hyper activity is almost comical in his eagerness to provide hospitality for his three unexpected guests. In the background Sarah is present, she listens to what is being said but remains silent. In Luke, Martha too is scurrying round fretting herself into a lather over the guests she has invited to her home, while her sister Mary calmly and silently listens to Jesus. In both readings the hustle and bustle of making the home ready and the provision of meals has gone into such overdrive that the respective host and hostess are driving themselves to distraction.

The God of surprises

In Genesis the metaphorical pause button is pressed by the spokesman of this unexpected trinity of visitors. He silences Abraham asking him "Where is your wife, Sarah." Likely Abraham's jaw dropped. How on earth would these strangers know his wife's name? He simply says "She's in the tent." Then the most attention-grabbing follow-up from the visitor "I will surely return to you in due season and your wife Sarah shall have a son." Again, how does the visitor know that she has been barren all her life and is now well-passed child-bearing age? Sarah's plight was so similar to other women in the bible who had endured the scorn of their peers because of their childlessness. Also, in the Old Testament Hannah who longed for a son, in due season bore the prophet, Samuel. Elizabeth in the New Testament bears forerunner John the Baptist. The difference with these two women is that they continued to pray earnestly and rejoiced on hearing that their prayers had been answered. Sarah and Abraham, however, have given up hope and instead, they swamp themselves with excessive activity. Had we read on, we would have learned Sarah laughed, on overhearing the news, failing to recognise that the divine message promised of decades earlier was to be fulfilled.

Be still and know that I am God

In Luke, Martha knows Jesus is special and speaks about faith in a transforming way compared with the religious practice of the day. Her priorities, however, like Abraham, were fixed on immediate hospitality. Mary on the other hand sees beyond the immediate needs and listens intently to Jesus, discerning the truth and wisdom in his words that are more urgent, more important than her sister's over-activity. Jesus too presses the pause button on Martha's frenetic housework. His words are not a put down but a way of saying enough

is as good as a feast. The more important matter was to pay attention to his words, while he was still with them. Jesus knew his time on earth was finite and that the way of the cross beckoned; Mary grasped this urgency.

Ignoring the obvious

In Abraham and Martha do we see examples of people who fill their time with displacement activity? They know there are serious matters that need attention but they shy away from facing the uncomfortable truth. Abraham and Sarah in advanced age had lost heart waiting for the son who had still not been born. Martha may well have recognised the way Jesus was treading but would rather avoid the unpalatable truth and so busied herself to avoid thinking.

Keep calm and then carry on!

What about us? We know how hard it is to follow the way of the cross. It requires the same qualities of Hannah and Elizabeth, of courage, perseverance and continued hope for answered prayers when all seems hopeless. It needs determination and the prioritisation values and listening-skills of Mary. The way of the cross is selflessly putting others first: to love those we do not like; to find forgiveness after a disagreement even when we are the injured party; to serve in diverse ways without seeking reward. No wonder Jesus, who was mobbed constantly by the crowds clamouring for his attention, saw the wisdom in taking himself off to a quiet place to pray. To acknowledge the pressure, to refocus and recharge in order to see his mission and ministry through to the end. In our daily routine of life and faith, sometimes the very thing we need to do, is the last thing we try. We can procrastinate and engineer activities to avoid addressing the things that truly matter. It's then that we need to press the pause button and sit and listen, so that God can get a word in edgewise into our hearts and minds. Sometimes, being still is the best way to learn everything that God wants us to know. Amen.