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Many of you know I have a sister. Her name is Page. She's a verger here at All Saints and she was an intern a couple years ago. If you don't know her, she has wild curly hair, a big smile, and an even bigger personality. I've been told that whenever there are two sisters, one is always the watcher and one is always the dancer. She is definitely the dancer and it's why I hate today's gospel reading. I'm clearly Martha, even though I'd love to be Page, er, I mean Mary.

Martha follows the rules and she doesn't stray from the rules even when God himself is standing in her living room. The rules have made her safe. She does not have to worry about what to do when Jesus is standing before her because it's been laid out for her: clean the dishes, put out bread, fill the glasses, etc. She doesn't have to worry that he won't like her, because she is following the rules. She has chosen safety over something unknown but truly spectacular. Her instinct is to please the Lord rather than to get to know the Lord.

I, too, am a rule follower. I have learned that this is my Achilles heel. This is what, if I let it, will keep me from knowing God. Because sometimes, I can be right in the middle of celebrating the Eucharist and the body of Christ will be in my hand and the only thing that is on my mind is whether or not I've missed that last note and the choir is going to be upset with me. And then other times, I've been beaten down and scared or hopeless and so I didn't have it in me to follow the rules and the nearness of God was so palpable that all I could do was weep in his presence. Those are the moments that have been etched into my soul and cause me to seek hungrily.

But it's a battle for me. I need structure, I need ritual, and I need to know something, not everything, but something so that I can orient myself in the direction of God and know that it's not just all in my head but is, in fact, real. I need to know that God's name is Jesus. I need to know that he died on the cross for my salvation, and I need to know that

he wanted me to love everybody. Those are the bits of information that give God shape and provide a story that tells me who I am.

If you were to tell me, after 33 years, that I'm actually adopted and the family history that I grew up knowing wasn't the whole story, I would feel completely lost. In the same way, if you told me that God was more than Jesus and that the story of his life, death, and resurrection wasn't the whole story, I would feel totally lost. But, the truth is, that I am more than my family history and there is still more for me to discover about myself. This was news to me when I was 25 but I'm starting to let that be Ok. In the same way, God is more than the story that is told in the bible and there is still more for us to discover.

The question is: are we Martha or are we Mary? Are we going to miss God when he's standing right in front of us because we are distracted by our tasks: saying our prayers, reciting the Nicene creed, singing a hymn, going to Sunday School... or are we going to sit at the Lord's feet and listened to what he has to say?

If I didn't become a priest, I would have been a scientist. Actually, what I want to say is that I did become a scientist when I became a priest. The two go hand in hand for me. My favorite book in seminary was Clayton and Peacocks: "In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World." The book begins with a great line: "the conviction that God is, in principle and by definition, ineffable, beyond all explicit description, greater than we can ever conceive, has in practice not inhibited human beings over the centuries from speculation—and often dogmatic assertion—concerning that same God's relation to the world." In other words, the fact that we all know God is too great to understand has not stopped us from trying to explain Him and therefore confine him to fit in a manageable sized box.

I think in our yearning for God, in our desperation to feel his love and be touched by our creator again, we hold on tight to what we have learned of him and we never let go, not even to see more of him. We are afraid that when we risk learning more, we will lose him altogether.

And that's a real fear. I'll never forget leaving my evangelical, non-denominational church. I was grasping at anything to get oriented to God again. It was scary. It seemed like there was too much out there and that I would never know the true God. Being in the image of God, it was very easy to cast myself as God. There was nothing to show me the way outside myself and I began to long for that balance sheet my former pastor had shown me. The one where he listed all my sins on one side and all my gifts on the other and then put a line through the debts side with the word "Jesus" scribbled on top. "That's everything," he had said and I desperately wanted that assurance of certainty again. But you know, it wasn't enough, and my faith began to fall flat. So I had to move forward. I had to move on.

Learning about who God actually is, who we are in relation to that God, and what we are supposed to be doing with this gift of a life is complicated and we were never meant to figure it out, full stop, and cease to grow. The answers, like us, evolve. And the more we evolve, the more connected we get to God and each other.

For that reason, I love today's passage from Colossians. It was originally a hymn and contained within this beautiful song is the story of creation and evolution; the acknowledgement that things have been hidden and can only be revealed through Christ who lives inside of us. This is echoing what Jesus tells us in the 16th chapter of John: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."

We did not receive the end of the story when Jesus lived, died, and resurrected. There was still more and I think in our aching to be reunited with Christ, we let the story define our relationship with him so that we wouldn't have to change and so that he couldn't change... and we would never have to lose him again.

But I'm beginning to sense that there is a restlessness among Christians. I'm beginning to feel like the story isn't enough anymore. I think that restlessness is causing a decline in membership across the country. Membership isn't suffering here but I think we can feel the restlessness from our brothers and sisters. People are starting to say things like "the church is dying." Our own bishop is telling new priests that they need to be "bi-vocational" because jobs are drying up and money is disappearing. Church, as we know it, is beginning to shift. And I think the gospel for today and the letter in Colossians is telling us that not only is this OK but is good and natural. Martha, Martha... there is need of only one thing: to sit and listen.

I believe we are currently in the throes of an evolutionary step forward: we are evolving spiritually. Theologian Matthew Flemming says that "the content and structure of Colossians...assert that the universe was ordered by the benevolence of God, who creates through a divine intermediary such as Wisdom or the law. Since humanity was also created in this manner, people possess within themselves the capacity to sense and locate the "divine order."

Today's text explains to us that we naturally have a private connection to God that pulls us toward him. Like the waves of the ocean that are pulled by the moon, so too, are we gently pulled by God. And I think humanity is beginning to wake up to that pulling on a massive scale. But I'm not sure we allow that private faith to get nurtured by our church because it doesn't always align with the old story or it doesn't seem like there is a place for it.

To give you an example of what I mean, I know that there are people in this church who don't believe that it matters that Jesus died on the cross. I also know that there are people in this church who believe that Jesus dying on the cross is the only thing that matters. Yet, we don't talk about it. I have my faith and you have yours and we come together to share in Christ's body and blood once a week and we call it a day. But the church cannot evolve along with us if we don't share our truths with each other.

In today's gospel, Jesus is telling us that he is standing right in front of us and he doesn't want us to miss him. He is giving us permission to let go a little bit and he is telling us that we are not going to lose him when we do. The fact that Mary is not doing what she is supposed to be doing and is instead simply listening has been noticed by Jesus and he says, "Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." So as we go up to that altar and we receive his body and drink his blood let us be present to that moment. Let's be open to what is coming up for us and how we are asked to move forward. And let's be a community that nurtures one another's truth.