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**17 July 2022, Pentecost 6C**

**Genesis 18:1-10a; Psalm 15; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42**

**St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana**

***What would it mean in your life to let Christ hold it all together?***

**Luke 10:38-42 NRSV, emended**

Now as [Jesus and his disciples] went on their way to Jerusalem, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus' feet and listened to what he was saying. However, 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." Instead, Jesus replied, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, and that will not be taken away from her."

**Colossians 1:15-28**

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. Christ himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Christ is the head of the body, the church; Christ is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Christ to reconcile to God's own self all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, Christ has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before God—provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to the saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is Christ whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

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I have a confession...and I'm probably not the only one here.

I am a recovering perfectionist.

Looking back, I'm not exactly sure when it started. Everyone always said I was a good kid, which can be code for being a kid who is easy to raise because they don't make waves, who don't ask anything of anyone else. I got good grades and stayed out of trouble, but more than that, I learned quickly to hide any strong emotions and do what I could to make others happy.

When I was a young adult, right out of college, I continued on the same path. I thought it was my job to keep it all together. I was married to a partner who did not regularly work - so I always worked two or more jobs in order to pay our bills. I did the complicated balancing act of budgeting when there isn't enough money coming in. And then I took on many more things, some of which I wanted, some of which made life easier for others - playing in the praise band at church, leading the midweek youth night, cooking a fellowship meal after church most weeks. I managed the world around us so that no one else was ever inconvenienced or distressed. And I did all of this while pasting a smile on my face and denying any difficulties that I might be having about balancing all of it. I thought that I was supposed to hold all these things together - that this is what you did as a successful adult or supportive spouse or good church person. I thought that somehow, I needed to be able to do all these things perfectly well to be worthy of being loved and cared for.

And I managed to hold it all together for a long time until it finally fell apart and I realized just how much I had been trying to hold - and how much of that wasn't even mine to try to hold on to.

I'm afraid I'm not the only one.

So many of us try to do it all, keep it all together. We manage every part of the world around us. We trust that, if we just work hard enough, we can keep our loved ones safe and happy, that somehow, my work and worry will keep it all together and then we'll be worthy.

Before the pandemic, it seemed like folks were stressed, balancing the demands of work and family and trying to find some time to care for themselves. Once COVID-19 hit, stressors increased exponentially, with concerns about health and uncertain childcare and working from home—or was it living from work? Every decision now has so many more filters than before, weighing a risk of infection or possible transmission to others, considering what sort of precautions you can take and whether the benefit of a gathering outweighs the risk. Even now, as things seem to be waning—or at least hopeful in a world with treatment and vaccines available—it is still too much to hold.

When I hear our Gospel reading today, I picture Martha in the same way, as a perfectionist, maybe not yet in recovery. I imagine she tries to do it all.

She was the one in the family who kept the household flowing effortlessly - you know, making sure that there was always fresh milk in the fridge and meals on the table, clean clothes in everyone's dresser. Most days, she probably did it with love and grace.

And then her dear friend showed up. They had extra guests - who knows how many of the seventy that followed Jesus were still hanging around - so she wanted to make sure they were comfortable, that every need was not just met, but anticipated before it could really become a need.

This time, Martha realized she needed help. Was it that someone finished the cookies and put the empty box back in the pantry? Or a friend innocently asking why Mary wasn't helping? Or simply exhaustion, telling her it was too much to bear all this alone?

Martha was able to hold it all together, until she wasn't.

She asked Jesus to tell Mary to help and got a less-than-helpful, enigmatic answer. "There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part." Hm.

Commentators through the years have wrestled with what Jesus meant here - Was he preferencing a contemplative life over a life of service, even though he just talked about hospitality and told the parable of the Good Samaritan?

Was he affirming the right of women to a theological education?

Was he critiquing Martha's fussy dinner menu, telling her she didn't need to cook as many dishes?

Yes, these are all things that really have been written.

In the letter to the Colossians, we are given a picture of who Christ is - the beginning and the end, source of creation and reconciliation and everything in between, that Christ is the one who holds it all together.

Reading these two passages together, I wonder if this may be the one thing that is needed, to know that in Christ all things hold together.

What would it mean in your life to let Christ hold it all together?

Quite simply, it is to remember that God is God - and we are not. That all our fretting and worrying, trying to make everyone else happy and comfortable and safe, is nothing compared to the God of the universe, the one who created us and redeems us. And because God created and redeemed us, we are worthy of love and being cared for.

In Jesus' death and resurrection, he took on all our sin and brokenness, all our fears and failures and exchanged it for his own completion, perfection and redemption. In Christ's death and resurrection, everything that pulls us from God, that threatens to pull us apart has been put back together. We are made new and able to try again.

The life of disciples is returning again and again, learning to trust in Christ, that he is the one who holds all things together.

When we take on too many things, too much responsibility for things that are not ours, we turn back to Christ.

When we trust in Christ, we are freed to sit in his presence. We are freed to be who God created us to be, freed for peace and wholeness.

We come to worship each week to practice returning to Christ, to sit at his feet and listen. We do our best to step away from our work and from everything that distracts us, letting Christ hold all things for us, even if just for an hour.

We come and we are welcomed into the community simply because of who we are, not because of what we are able to do, not because of how well we are able to hold it all together. We lay down all the things we have been holding on to at the foot of the cross, giving them to God for safe-keeping, trusting the one who created us and the one who redeemed us will continue to hold all things together so that we can open our hands in praise, to receive the gifts of life and salvation.

We pass by the font, where we welcome all people, including babies who remind us that this is a gift, not based on what we can do and manage, that we are loved simply because we are.

In our confession, we confess that we cannot hold it all together, do it all right. And when we receive the absolution, we are reminded of the gift of God's grace in our lives.

We offer whatever we have to give, knowing that it doesn't depend on any one of us and what we can do and give, but that together there will be enough.

Then we come to the table that we did not set. We gather around the place where Christ is both host and meal, welcomed by Christ and fed by Christ.

But above all, we are invited to commend everything to God, trusting it all to Christ. And so we are freed to love fully and deeply, to work for justice and peace. We are freed to be restored and join in God's work restoring our world.

Christ is ready and able to hold together all things.

In fact, he already is.

And to that, I say Amen, come Lord Jesus.