

## **LOCKDOWN DAY 126 – 30 JULY 2020**

Molweni dear family and our friends of False Bay Diocese,

Scripture: Luke 10:38-42 AWF Hymn: *We assembled stand before thee offering thee our humble love*

The gates are closing to another month given to us by God. Thank you for sharing your time, talents and money so richly with the Diocese through your local congregations. We must emerge out of lockdown better than we went into it. Please support one another through Covid-19. There is no stigma.

Today we celebrate Mary and Martha, the Patron Saints of the Anglican Women's Fellowship. I offer this reflection alongside what your AWF branches have already received from your Diocesan Chaplain and President. Should you want to consider joining the Fellowship, their aims are:

- Prayer and Worship
- Mission and Witness
- Fellowship and Study
- Service and Stewardship

Like the members of our AWF, Martha and Mary are clearly very different characters. They do not always get on with each other, but they love and trust each other enough to learn from each other. Their differences are essential for opportunities for each to grow.

We tend to think that we know the story of Mary and Martha quite well and that it suggests that learning is all one way: Mary is right and Martha is wrong and may even feel that Jesus is less than just. After all, somebody has to make preparations for guests, get dinner ready, clean up and so on. We can't all sit about in a contemplative daze.

So, let us look with more care at the passage set for us today, and see what it actually says, rather than what we think it does.

It says, for one thing, that this all happens in Martha's house. There is no mention of any male relative. All Luke's first readers would have known instantly that this was an example of Jesus' famed radical stance towards women. He is doing something very daring by being in that house at all, when they are not his family.

But Martha and Mary are also doing something daring by welcoming this man into their home. Their reputations are definitely going to suffer. No wonder Martha is in a bit of a flap: it is her home, she is the one who has taken the bold decision to invite Jesus in.

If Paul's letters are anything to go by, Luke's first readers, the earliest Christians, would have been meeting in just such homes, and would have been debating whether or not women could be hosts and leaders at their gatherings. Luke, with his well known interest in women, is suggesting that Jesus set them a precedent here.

Luke goes on to show Jesus specifically commending Mary for sitting at his feet and listening to him. Students might sit at the feet of rabbis to learn, but women didn't. If women were present at all, it was simply to provide food and drink, and to remain quietly out of sight. Once again, for Luke's first readers this would have played into the discussion about women disciples. Were they just here to enable and facilitate the men's vocations, or could they be true disciples themselves? Luke is saying that Jesus has already answered that question.

If this text and context is taken seriously, Jesus' words to Martha are a clear call: women, like men, need to put discipleship above everything else.

And that is surely the point, dear Anglican Women's Fellowship, like Martha, we are all "worried and distracted by many things". There are so many things that have real claim upon our times and upon our hearts, where we feel justified in saying with indignation, "We can't all be contemplatives. Someone has to do the work!" Of course, that is true. But we must not let our worries and duties mask our real nature, or most important task, which is to be disciples of Jesus.

Contemplation is taking a long, loving look at the real and being aware of what is before us. Contemplation awakens us to possibilities around us, seeing and hearing afresh, as if with focus for the first time.....seeing and hearing as God sees and hears.

In the midst of this pandemic of Covid-19 and Gender Based Violence, as the Anglican Women's Fellowship and as clergy and people of the Diocese, we need to make a commitment to be engaged in bringing God's healing, creative power into lives around us. Men and women of the Diocese must work hand in hand. We must help each other walk through darkness into light.

The gospel story of Mary and Martha is also touching on inclusivity and the equal status of men and women. Let us continue to work at transformation. In our Diocese, we passed a Resolution at our 2014 Synod that a minimum of 50% of all Parish Councillors should be women and at least 15% shall be between 18 and 35 years. We have carried that through to representation at Diocesan and Provincial Synods. So far just over a quarter of the makeup of our Chapter are women. As a church, we need to improve on using liturgical language that reflects the images of God as gender-neutral. Some of our congregations, Ottery being one, have moved away from calling their priest 'Father' as it reflects a male clericalism. As clergy, let us consider calling each other by gender friendly titles, such as: Moruti or Mfundisi (plural is Abefundisi), for Priests. A Deacon is UmDikoni for one and AbaDikoni for Deacons. Revd is also inclusive. Start the conversation in your local congregations and circles.

Let us walk in the same manner as Mary and Martha walked, to the glory of God. Congratulations and every blessing Anglican Women's Fellowship on this your Patronal Festival. We appreciate your generous Mission, Witness, Service and Stewardship in our Diocese.

Today, please **reach out** to any person bearing the name Mary or Martha and any member of the Anglican Women's Fellowship.

**Let us Pray:**

"May the Christ who walks on wounded feet, walk with you on the road; May the Christ who serves with wounded hands, stretch out your hands to serve; May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart, open your hearts to love. When you go out, may you see the face of Jesus in everyone you meet, and may everyone you meet see the face of Jesus in you."

If you know it, close with the Anglican Women's Fellowship Prayer.

I am. Because we Are, Because God is.....Opening hearts to heal God's world. *Goodbye and God be with you until we meet again on Monday.*