

Sermons at the All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Alison Heal on Sunday 20th July 2025

Bible passages: Amos 8: 1-12 and Luke 10:38-end

I wonder how you feel about routines? In the Gospel reading today, Martha had some good routines going. She was welcoming Jesus back into her house, and she was handling all the usual household routines as well as the additional ones of having guests.

Maybe you're someone like Martha, who's discovered the value of routines – I've worked out myself, that if I have to decide *if* I'm going to do something, it's tiring to make a decision and a bit of a bother to decide 'yes'. But if I don't **have to** decide, if it's something that's become part of my daily routine, it's no bother, it's just something I do. That goes for emptying the dish washer and wiping the table, as much as it does for praying morning, noon and night. Either way, the routine makes the decision for me, and I don't rely on whether I 'feel like doing it', to get it done. On our Sanctuary Day recently, Jolyon spoke about 'training' rather than 'trying', and I think that puts it well. 'Trying' is about an act of will, and we're eventually doomed to fail. 'Training' is about adopting a routine, and with exercise, with household chores, and with becoming closer to God, it's known to work.

So routines can be a huge help in many areas of our lives. But in our reading from Amos, we see the *danger* of routines. The prophet Amos gives God's warning to the people of Israel. These are people who are routinely celebrating the feasts God has ordered. They're people who are singing the right songs and keeping the sabbath every week. The routine is there. But God tells them that he wants to give up on them, because they're just waiting for their holy days to be over, so that they can get back to trampling on the needy. They're doing their routine religious practice by rote, then going straight back to cheating the poor. Somehow, the routine has become divorced from their hearts, and instead of being formative, allowing God to changing them from the inside, it's become meaningless to them.

The story we heard, in JC and here in church, last Sunday, was one which the Gospel writer Luke wanted us to put alongside today's account of Mary and Martha. Like any biographer, Luke had to make some choices about what he wrote down, and what order he put it in. Getting it in strict chronological order wasn't his biggest priority – he made editorial choices about how he grouped events in Jesus' life together. He often chose to put a story about women next to a story about men, for example. He liked to pair stories about Jesus healing blind people, with stories about how people in the know seemed to be blind to what Jesus was doing.



And, if you remember these Helping Hands, you'll remember that the event which Luke wanted to be viewed alongside this story of Mary and Martha is a parable of Jesus where two godly men let their **religious routine** blind them to God's purpose for their life at a key moment.

In the story of the Good Samaritan, two men decide to avoid a probably dead body, because touching it will prevent them from serving God in the temple. A spiritual 'nobody' makes the right choice, and acts as neighbour to a man in desperate need.

Luke then takes us straight into the story of Jesus' visit to Martha and Mary. He's obviously asking us, in some way, to compare and contrast the behaviour of the men in the Good Samaritan story, to the behaviour of the women as they welcome Jesus.

The two men had routine religious duties to do, and these routines held them back when a real-life situation broke in. (I've felt the same. One day when we were taking our boys to church we went past a man lying on a park bench, and everyone passing him was worried, because you couldn't really tell if he was asleep, or unconscious, or even dead. While I was feeling worried about what on earth we could do, I spotted another woman going up and checking on him, cautiously but very politely. He responded. In that event, she was the Good Samaritan, I was one of the other two men.) seems that in the story of Martha and Mary, Martha has got so fixed on the routine she knows is right, that she doesn't let the Kingdom of God break in and open her eyes to something new that God is doing. Her routines of hospitality are good, just like the routines of the priest and the Levite, just like your routines and mine. But Mary, like the Good Samaritan, senses that something new, something *outside* the routine, has broken into their lives. The Kingdom of God has come near! She drops all the usual routines and aligns herself with Jesus. He's sitting and talking, so she sits and listens. It may not be normal behaviour for a woman in her culture, but it's what the Holy Spirit calls her to at that moment.

PAUSE

Amos warned the people of Israel that they were going about their religious routines, while completely ignoring God's command to love their neighbour.

The Good Samaritan broke his routines of travel and personal safety to investigate and meet the needs of a helpless enemy.

Mary recognised the Kingdom of God, coming near in Jesus, and abandoned all her usual routines to align herself to what he was doing.

In your life, in mine, what is the Holy Spirit prompting us to do, to align ourselves with what Jesus is doing? Where do we find Jesus today, among the poor, among enemies, *and* in our daily routine?

Let's bow our heads and pray:

Lord Jesus, in you, the Kingdom of God is revealed to us. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, so that we find you both through, and despite, our routines of faith and worship. Wherever you call us, prompt us to listen, to respond, and to act, in your name.

Amen