



**Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church**  
**Asheville, North Carolina**  
**July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019**

**Rev. Samantha Gonzalez-Block**

**Sermon: "Deep Clean"**

**Psalm 52**

**Luke 10:38-42**

*PSALM 52: <sup>1</sup>Why do you boast, O mighty one,  
of mischief done against the godly?*

*All day long <sup>2</sup>you are plotting destruction.*

*Your tongue is like a sharp razor,  
you worker of treachery.*

*<sup>3</sup>You love evil more than good,  
and lying more than speaking the truth.*

*<sup>4</sup>You love all words that devour,  
O deceitful tongue.*

*<sup>5</sup>But God will break you down forever;  
God will snatch and tear you from your tent;  
God will uproot you from the land of the living.*

*<sup>6</sup>The righteous will see, and fear,  
and will laugh at the evildoer, saying,*

*<sup>7</sup>"See the one who would not take  
refuge in God,  
but trusted in abundant riches,  
and sought refuge in wealth!"*

*<sup>8</sup>But I am like a green olive tree  
in the house of God.*

*I trust in the steadfast love of God  
forever and ever.*

*<sup>9</sup>I will thank you forever,  
because of what you have done.*

*In the presence of the faithful  
I will proclaim your name, for it is good.*

*Luke 10:38-42: <sup>38</sup>Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. <sup>39</sup>She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. <sup>40</sup>But 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." <sup>41</sup>But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; <sup>42</sup>there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.*

What did you do to get ready to come to church today?  
Did you take a long hot shower this morning or did you only have time to splash some water on your face? Did you put a handful of product in your hair? Did you quickly tidy up your beard? Did someone get you dressed? Did you pick out your own outfit?  
Did you iron your shirt or just use the ol' shower-steam trick?  
What did you do to get ready to come and praise God?

The truth is, no matter how down-to-earth we might feel, we are still products of a culture that teaches us that we have got to "clean up" for church.

This can mean more than just our wardrobe. When we come through those sanctuary doors, we might feel inclined to present our best selves to one another and to God: The perfect family. The healing body. The strong relationship. The highlights from our week.

We might not always want to unveil the more vulnerable pieces of our lives (our worries and our pain). Instead, we hide our vulnerability behind bright smiles and warm handshakes.

We tell ourselves to joyfully pass the peace, to harmonize beautifully with hundreds, to sit upright in our pews, to never doze off while the preacher preaches. We do our very best to clean up our look and our act in order to ready ourselves to receive the good news.

*But why do we feel so much pressure to "clean up" for God?*

Now, we don't know if Mary and Martha were expecting to see Jesus that day. We don't know if they had urged him to come over or if he had just invited himself in. We don't know if they had been awaiting his arrival for days or if he had come unannounced before they had time to tidy up their home.

All we know is that as soon as Jesus enters through the doorway, Martha quickly distracts herself with her many tasks. We can imagine that she begins to feverishly clean up - far away from her sister, far away from their divine guest.

Her distracted state is more intense than a loss of focus. No, in this moment, Martha is driven by anxiety. She is overwhelmed and panicked. She cleans with a fury, lost in the moment, palms sweating and heart beating fast.

*What is Martha so concerned about cleaning up?  
What is she so desperate to hide or scrub or toss?  
What in this moment is really keeping her from coming close to Jesus?*

When it comes to our tradition, cleaning up for God is not a new concept. Rather, it is an ancient aspect of our faith. Our earliest ancestors immersed themselves in a ritual bath called a *mikvah* before being able to participate in temple life.

In fact, when a new temple was built, the mikvah was always the first thing to be constructed. Taking a ritual bath was an essential part of upholding sacred purity laws: bodies were cleaned in order to be ready to praise God and do God's work in the world.

*But what does it mean to be made clean?*

As Christianity began to take shape, baptism grew out of this mikvah tradition. When we are baptized, we enter the water as a symbol of our sinful bodies (dying with Christ) and then emerging from it (refreshed, saved and purified by God's grace).

Getting clean has thus become synonymous with becoming one with Jesus – a notion that through the years has been used to liberate and empower, as well as subjugate and divide.

We know that certain bodies in our society are deemed cleaner and more precious than others. Some bodies have been considered dirty, sinful, sexual, dangerous or even expendable.

Darker skinned bodies. Women's bodies. LGBTQ bodies.

Differently abled bodies. Undocumented bodies.

Bodies to be controlled, dismissed, caged, and criminalized.

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Recently, I attended a discussion about the opioid crisis in Buncombe County, led by the Director of Steady Collective, Hill Brown. As many of you know, Steady Collective is one of our ministry partners. It is a non-profit that focuses on harm reduction, including things like needle exchanges, reversing overdoses, and educating our community about how to treat those facing addiction with dignity and kindness.

At the event, Hill spoke candidly about the harmful ways our society talks about those who battle drug addiction. Hill explained that drug addiction is an illness, like any other illness, and yet we have criminalized – really, villainized - those who suffer from it (especially people of color). Illegal drugs have been a concern for years, but now that it is affecting more wealthy white communities, it is being called a national crisis.

Hill shared that we often use cleanliness language when talking about addiction. Those who are not addicted are referred to as “clean” (thus those who struggle with addiction are considered “dirty”). Hill reminded us that attitudes like this go all the way back to our Bible where the leper, the prostitute, the poor, and those suffering most were considered unclean – and thus were unable to enter into the temple or be formally welcomed into society.

And yet these are the people, “the outcasts” and the “ritually impure,” who Jesus reaches out to again and again. It is with the most vulnerable bodies that Christ identifies and invites into relationship. The bodies we call unclean are the ones Jesus calls close.

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Knowing this, we are left to wonder...what brings Jesus to Mary and Martha's door?  
What does Jesus know about them – that we do not?  
How have their bodies struggled?  
How have they been treated as unclean?  
What does he see in them that they are unable to see in themselves?

This story is very familiar to us. And many of us have strong feelings about it. Often times when we read this text, we are asked to identify with one of the sisters ("*Are you a Mary or are you a Martha?*"). These two sisters always get pitted against each other (one is deemed right, and the other wrong).

Martha, who is showing radical hospitality – cooking and cleaning for Jesus – is scolded for it. Mary, on the other hand, who is only doing nothing but sitting at Christ's feet is commended for it. *Come on!*

But as I looked at the text this week, I came across a *new* Martha, one who is not cutting vegetables or setting a table, but a Martha that is cleaning up in a frenzy - for fear of what Jesus might see. This Martha, is one with whom we can all identify. Surely each of us here has things in our lives that we don't want anyone to see, maybe not even God.

I wonder if you can stretch your imaginations with me for a moment.

Maybe Martha is frantically tucking the liquor bottle deep in the cabinet.  
Maybe she is hiding the photo of her daughter who she has not seen in years.  
Maybe Martha is quickly closing her diary, fearful that Jesus might see the details of her depression laid across every page.  
Maybe she is crinkling up her final notice from the power company letting her know that she will be sitting in darkness next week – unless.  
Maybe she is piling up her old college textbooks, tangible reminders of the dreams she once had before dropping out.  
Maybe Martha is smearing cover up over the newest blue-black circle around her eye (the one she does not talk about, not even with her sister).

And then in the midst of Martha's chaotic clean up, Jesus stops her with these words: "*Martha, Martha,*" It is not often that a name is uttered twice in our Bible. Such cries are reserved for prophets and lament songs; but in this moment, it speaks of yearning and belonging. "*You are worried and distracted by many things; Jesus says, there is need of only one thing.*"

Jesus is tenderly asking Martha to stop cleaning up – to stop worrying, doubting, and hiding. He invites her to come close exactly as she is, as someone who is worthy to receive his wisdom, his listening ear, and his unconditional love.

Jesus says that Mary has chosen the better part, but Mary is holding back in this moment too. As Martha's sister, we wonder why Mary leaves her to clean all by herself.

Maybe Mary is ashamed of her sister's situation.  
Maybe they have always pushed each other buttons, blamed each other for their pain.  
Maybe they haven't spoken in months – still waiting for the other to apologize.  
Maybe Mary wants to be as far away from her sister as she can. She sits with a smile by Jesus's feet, hoping to mask the bitterness and loneliness she feels deep in her bones.

But Jesus sees this situation for what it is also.  
He invites Martha near – to sit with him and her sister.

We don't know what happens next in this story, but I like to imagine that with Christ's urging, Mary gets up, walks toward Martha, takes her hand, and brings her over to Jesus. And then these three sit together for hours. They speak hard and heartbreaking truth into each other's eyes, they laugh and they cry, and they hear good news that changes everything.

*Why do we feel so much pressure to clean up for God?*

This week has felt like an especially difficult one for our country. Along with the continued chaos at our border, we have heard vicious rhetoric, cruel chants and threats made toward congresswomen of color – who are being told that their bodies do not belong here. We are being taught that naming the brokenness in our nation and society can be interpreted as un-American, especially if you are a person of color.

As your pastor and a Latina, I want you to know that this hatefulness reverberates outward, and I have felt especially vulnerable in my own skin this week – wondering if I should hide some part of my identity in order to feel fully welcome or safe.

The truth is, we are living in a time, when we cannot wash our hands and distance ourselves from what is going on. We cannot try to mask the ugliness, downplay the divisiveness, dismiss the danger. Now, more than ever, we must stop and listen for Christ's voice calling to us as people of faith to name (and claim) our brokenness and our complacency.

*What is keeping us from coming close to Jesus?*

Just like Mary and Martha, God does not ask us to clean up our lives in order to welcome Christ in. Christ is already here: offering life-altering, life-affirming truth that we are loved and claimed, just as we are. No need to wipe away the dirt, no need to hide the pain.

Jesus dares us to be open and vulnerable so that we can be in right relationship with God and with one another, so that we can be beacons of hope and positive change in our world.

Friends, Christ is already here,  
so we need only do one thing:  
Sit at his feet and lean in close.