



# First United

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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JULY 20, 2025

THE SERVICE FOR THE LORD'S DAY

GATHERING MUSIC

Chaconne

Louis Couperin (ca. 1626-1661)

Processional on *Azmon*

Anna Laura Page (b. 1943)

WELCOME & FRAMING

\*GATHERING WORDS

adapted from Rev. Dr. A.R. Neal Mathers

“For everything there is a time...”

**yet time is our most precious commodity.**

Our clocks are always running—tick, tock, tick, tock—

**from birth to death, during times of joy and sorrow, work and play,  
in our activism and in our self-care, too.**

Guide us in the dance of wise women who know the rhythm of balance:

**for the work of love requires devotion to the practical  
and devotion to the spiritual.**

Slow us down Lord, and for now simply remind us that only one thing is needful:

**that we be still before you and know that you are God.**

\*OPENING HYMN

“Awake with Timbrel and with Dance”

(Tune: *Azmon*)

***Awake with Timbrel and with dance and sing to God on high.  
With olive wreath and waving branch, our Maker magnify!***

***Join Sarah, blest with laughing child, and Deborah fierce and strong.  
Join Judith’s spirit, undefiled, and Miriam’s triumph song.***

***Hear Christ call, “Little girl, arise!” as Jairus’ daughter lives.  
Watch bent grow straight, and recognize the healing Jesus gives.***

***Awake to sing with glad acclaim. God’s daily gifts discern.  
With Martha, name Christ’s holy name. With Mary, seek and learn.***

CALL TO CONFESSION

Some people say the great addiction of our age is busy-ness.

Being busy confirms our importance in the world.

Sitting still leaves time to consider the things we have done

and the things we have left undone.  
This is hard work, but it is necessary for our relationship with God.  
Let us open our hearts in prayer:

#### PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**All-seeing God, the mirror of scripture reveals who we are and who we are not. Envious, we complain about those who are not doing what we think they should, and ignore our own failings. You know the condition of our hearts—the words we never should have said, and the words that were needed but remained unspoken. You know the ways we spend our time—the projects we have abandoned, and the things we did but wish we hadn't. We confess all of the ways we hold what isn't necessary too tightly, and let important connections slip through our fingers. Have mercy on us. Protect us from distraction, Radical Love. Sit us down at Jesus' feet, so we may learn the balanced life you intend for us. Then, and only then, we can set aside our grudges, and find wholeness for ourselves. Steady our gaze. Plant devotion in our hearts. Turn us towards what is ours to do today. Amen.**

*Silence is kept for Prayer and Reflection.*

#### ASSURANCE OF PARDON

All things are held together and reconciled in our Lord Jesus Christ.  
That includes every one of us.  
No matter what has happened in the past,  
those who turn to God are forgiven.  
Recreated in God's image, we are made whole.  
When we are in Christ, everything becomes new.  
This is the Good News that brings new life—  
thanks be to God!

#### \*PASSING OF THE PEACE

The Peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you!  
**And also with you!**

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### SUNG PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

#414- *Be Still and Know*

***Be still and know that I am God.  
Be still and know that I am God.***

#### SCRIPTURE

Colossians 1:15-28  
Luke 10:38-42

#### SERMON

“Burnout in the Body of Christ”

Last week, we learned from the Good Samaritan that being a neighbor—being a disciple—is all about compassion, not just an empathetic feeling, but as a motivation that drives us to action, to care for our neighbors. In today's reading, we see the consequences of doing just that, of constantly putting others' needs above your own, of devoting your full self to caring for your

neighbor without taking time for true rest and recovery. Martha shows up in this story with a classic case of burnout, or as it's sometimes called in caring professions, compassion fatigue.

The World Health Organization introduced “burnout” in the 2020 edition of the International Classification of Diseases. In response to the pandemic, this term for an occupational syndrome

resulting from chronic stress, became part of our lexicon. Burnout is exhaustion—a physical, cognitive, and emotional fatigue that makes it difficult to concentrate on details, but also blurs our ability to see the big picture or to imagine any future at all. A growing sense of cynicism distances us from caring about work that is supposed to be rooted in compassion, but also causes us to withdraw from relationships with our collaborators. Burnout often follows conflict as we become more aware of unfair policies and injustice, and begin to feel like we have little agency to make a difference. Finally, burnout is characterized by a sense of hopelessness—the feeling that what we are doing will ultimately make no difference—which often happens when we feel like there's a scarcity of resources—not enough time, not enough information, not enough clarity about what it is we are doing, not enough autonomy, not enough support, not enough feedback to see if there has been any measurable change.

Does this sound familiar? While burnout is diagnosed based on workplace parameters, it can also show up in caretaking roles at home and in how we pour our time into ministry and advocacy work, too. Six months since this administration took office, and those feelings of despair, of scarcity as funding disappears, of cynicism as there seems to be no justice or accountability—friends, the conditions are ripe for compassion fatigue. And, in many ways, this is nothing new. Martha, who sat at the feet of Jesus, also knew what burnout feels like.

In today's gospel reading, we are introduced to sisters Mary and Martha. This is a familiar story to us, and yet, the way many of us have been taught this story is overshadowed by centuries of gender politics. So often, I have heard this text as sister being pitted against one another—and we, as listeners, are supposed to choose if we identify more with Mary or Martha, Mary who sits to learn vs. Martha who is busy with cooking and cleaning and gendered expectations of hospitality. But none of that is actually in the text...

Martha had a sister, Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet. Mary and Martha were both granted status as disciples. Martha and Mary both studied with Jesus and learned from him. There never was a choice between spiritual work and household chores—both sisters studied with the rabbi. Second, Martha was so preoccupied with her tasks as a *διακονία* – a deacon! The work of a deacon was—and is still—the work of compassion and JUSTICE; a calling from God distinct from but no less important than the prophets, evangelists, and apostles. Martha's work was focused on caring for the marginalized within the community by collecting and distributing food and other resources to make sure that everyone had enough to survive. When Martha was working in the kitchen, it was not some 1950s Betty Crocker nonsense—she was making the meal stretch to feed as many hungry neighbors as possible. She was helping elders in her community get the medicines they needed. She was standing up for the children who had no protector and helping the newly arrived immigrant family get settled. Martha was exhausted because of the love she poured out for her neighbors meant having her heart break a thousand times over when her neighbors continued to suffer and be exploited, despite her never-ending justice work.

Scholar Mary Stromer Hanson argues that Martha approaches Jesus because her sister is physically present for the encounter.<sup>1</sup> Mary had joined the throng of disciples who followed Jesus and traveled with him to do short-term ministry in lots of places. Martha begs Jesus to send her sister back to work alongside her because there is so much need in their home village. Martha is not demanding that Mary get back in the kitchen, but that Mary stay put for a while and care for neighbors they grew up with—for the extended family that needs just as much support long-term as those strangers that Mary might know for a few days as Jesus moved towards Jerusalem. It's the same dynamic that many churches juggle in terms of how to approach mission—short intense service abroad vs. long-term relationships in one's own hometown. Both types of service have merit, but Martha is feeling overwhelmed and needs help now.

Honestly, Martha needed help long before now, before she reached the point of burnout and fragmentation. Jesus is staying in Martha's home, and yet, she could not enjoy his company, find inspiration in her work, receive any wisdom he wished to offer her. As Debie Thomas writes, "all [Martha] could do was question his love ("Lord, do you not care?"), fixate on herself ("My sister has left me") and triangulate ("Tell her then to help me.")<sup>2</sup>

Jesus does not condemn or dismiss Martha. He recognizes her and the work that she is doing. He sees her in the midst of the struggle and recognizes her passion. He sees her exhaustion. Even in naming her, he honors her vital role in her community. Jesus, like any good therapist, helps Martha to see herself without judgment and offer herself compassion. The root of the word for "worry" (θυρβαζει) is the same as the verb "to seize by the neck or to strangle." The root of the word for "distract" (μεριμνω) means "to pull apart into pieces," which more often describe a riot or a violent mob. We tend to minimize and dismiss worries and distractions, but these are violent words. Jesus helps Martha to see how her prioritizing service to others is choking her and tearing her apart—this is not God's vision for us of wholeness, abundance, and flourishing. When Jesus says to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves, we cannot leave caring for ourselves out of the equation.

Jesus's answer to Martha's request is kind: Mary has put healthy boundaries on her work and gotten specific about what her role is, her goal is, and what the context of her ministry looks like. Jesus will not deny Mary her chance to play a part in sharing God's goodness with the world. Perhaps Martha, and all of us, can learn from Mary. When we feel overwhelmed by the enormity of need, it helps us to get more focused—"only one thing is necessary," be it one person, one family, one group of folks experiencing a common issue. Boundaries give us more clarity, precision, and focus. Boundaries help our ministry remain sustainable.

While the scriptural account of this interaction ends here, the story does not. We have the opportunity to imagine what came next. What do you think happens? As so much of Christ's teaching and healing is rooted in relationship, I want to imagine that he supports Martha by finding more collaborators to share in her work. Does Jesus tell Peter to get off his laurels and do something helpful? Does he invite volunteers who have grown weary of the road to stay

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Stromer Hanson, *The New Perspective on Mary and Martha*.

<sup>2</sup> Debie Thomas, "Only One Thing," *Journey with Jesus*.

put Martha's village to help her long-term? Does Jesus send Martha on a Sabbatical or a retreat to find some peace? Does Jesus himself cut his lecture short that night so that he can work alongside her in caring for those in need?

The story of Martha's burnout reminds us that we have to create a sustainable rhythm of life that includes time for justice work AND time for self-care. And, self-care is more than an occasion treat or night off. Self-care means physical rest, mental rest, emotional rest, social rest, sensory rest, creative rest, and spiritual rest. Next week, we'll talk more about the types of rest and how nurturing our spiritual lives is part of our discipleship, too.

Remember, our goal is not to recover enough to keep working: the goal is full restoration and wholeness for ourselves and all of creation, something that is hard for us to imagine. When our worries are tearing us apart, we turn to Christ, as the Colossians sang, "Christ holds all and reconciles all things." Ultimately, God's vision of justice, liberation, and wholeness for the world is not up to us. We do our part, and let God hold what is too great for us to bear. Being able to let go and make space for others to work alongside us is an act of faith. Beloved, may our discipleship include compassion for others, and compassion for ourselves, too. Amen.

\*SONG

"When Jesus Went to Bethany"  
(Tune: *Tallis Canon*)

***When Jesus went to Bethany  
for Martha's hospitality,  
she made him welcome in her home,  
for she was sure the Christ had come.***

***When Jesus went to Bethany.  
there Mary studied eagerly.  
She knelt to wash his feet, and poured  
her precious ointment for the Lord.***

***When Jesus went to Bethany,  
two sisters loved him faithfully.  
May we, like them, both learn and serve,  
and fill this household with our love.***

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

PASTORAL PRAYER

God, still our hearts: **let us rest in you.**

God, our loving Parent, you created us in love,  
and we are grateful for your continued loving care for each of us, and for all of creation.  
Help us embrace the invitation to sit at your feet and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.  
God, still our hearts: **let us rest in you.**

We give thanks for the gifts of the present, and for your presence with us.  
We thank you for the food that sustains our bodies and  
for the fellowship we share with others that sustains our souls.

We give thanks for the work of so many people who have had a hand in the food that we eat.  
We thank you for farmers and harvesters, for factory workers and grocery store clerks, and we pray for their flourishing.  
God, still our hearts: **let us rest in you.**

We also pray for those who are hungry,  
for places where resources have been ravaged by natural and humanitarian disasters.  
We pray especially for the people of Gaza –  
for peace in the region, desperately needed assistance,  
and healing of the land and the people,  
so that houses can again be built, and fields planted.  
God, still our hearts: **let us rest in you.**

We thank you for the beauty of your created world,  
and the creative spark that flows in each of us.  
We thank you for the time we have for rest and restoration,  
and recognize that many people do not have the same.  
We pray for those who are working all hours, expending energy and time to meet basic needs,  
and who still don't have enough to make ends meet.  
We pray for a world that enables all people the time and resources  
not only to meet basic needs, but to exercise their gifts of creativity and skill.  
God, still our hearts: **let us rest in you.**

We thank you for your unending concern for justice and liberation for all people.  
We enjoy so many privileges that it can be easy to forget  
that so many continue to live under the weight of unjust systems and policies.  
None of us is free until we are all free.  
We pray for leaders in our communities and throughout the world  
to be inspired by your compassion and wisdom.  
Bring a change of heart and action where that is needed,  
and give us the courage to speak and act boldly to call our leaders  
and our community towards your beloved community and the healing of creation.  
God, still our hearts: **let us rest in you.**

There are so many ways we are distracted from what is most important.  
Center us in your Holy Spirit and lead us to abide in relationship with you.  
Thank you for hearing our prayers,  
and for inviting us to bring our joys, cares and burdens to you.  
Loving God, we offer these prayers to you,  
including those that remain on our hearts, and those known only to you,  
in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying, "Our Creator..."

LORD'S PRAYER

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY

*An offering plate will be passed during the service,  
or you may give online through Tithe.ly: <https://tithe.ly/give?c=1309305>*

*Please note where you would like your gift to be directed (general fund, deacons, etc.)*

OFFERTORY

\*DOXOLOGY

“Glory, Gratitude, and Praise”

***Glory and gratitude and praise now let earth to heaven raise.  
Glory and gratitude and praise: these we offer to God.***

\*PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**Giver of all good and perfect gifts, with joy, we share what we have to support the ministry of this faith community. Bless these resources that needs will be met, lives will be changed, and the world will be transformed through the abundance of your grace. In your name we pray, Amen.**

\*CLOSING HYMN

#543- *God, Be the Love to Search and Keep Me*

***God, be the love to search and keep me;  
God, be the prayer to move my voice;  
God, be the strength to now uphold me:  
O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.***

***Bind to myself the Name of Holy,  
Great cloud of witnesses enfold;  
Prophets, apostles, angels witness:  
O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.***

***Brightness of sun and glow of moonlight,  
Flashing of lightning, strength of wind,  
Depth of the sea to soil of planet:  
O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.***

***Walking behind to hem my journey,  
Going ahead to light my way,  
And from beneath, above, and all ways:  
O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.***

***Christ in the eyes of all who see me,  
Christ in the ears that hear my voice,  
Christ in the hearts of all who know me:  
O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.***

CHARGE & BENEDICTION

As Jesus says “Martha, Martha,”  
be still and listen, for God is calling your own name, too, Beloved.  
Where is Devotion nudging you to get to work? Go there!  
Where is Wisdom inviting you to let yourself be cared for? Pause there!  
Find balance in caring for yourself and others, dear friends,  
for you are too precious and the world’s need is too great  
to allow the myth of productivity consume your gifts  
and leave you burned out!  
May God meet you in stillness, may Christ’s love root you in service,  
and may the Spirit keep you balanced, this day and every day. Amen!

## SENDING MUSIC

Dismissal on *Azmon*

Jeffrey Neal Blersch (*b. 1967*)



**Pastor:** Rev. Marranda Major (marranda@unitedprestroy.org)

**Guest Organist:** David A. Vredenburg – Eastern NY Chapter,  
American Guild of Organists (AGO)

**Onscreen Visuals:** Charlotte Albertin, Martha Juenger,  
and Jim Parmelee

**Audiovisual Production:** Dan Rogers and Martha Juenger

### **Session**

#### *Class of 2026*

Dan Rogers  
Peggy Smith Savchik  
Sue Wright

#### *Class of 2027*

Jim Parmelee  
Sue Steele  
Marilynn O'Dell

#### *Class of 2028*

Alan Chandler  
Kodzo Dzikunu  
Bruce Reed

### **Diaconate**

#### *Class of 2026*

Peg Drew  
Martha Juenger  
Pat Rudebush

#### *Class of 2027*

Debbie Brown  
Miriam Parmelee  
Brenda Westbrook

#### *Class of 2028*

Diane Chandler  
Olga Green  
Noel Hains