

“Tuning In”

Most people, if they have a radio select their channel or station by pushing a preset button. Presets make it is easier for me to surf networks when I am listening to a program and decide to check out a different one, while the original one has gone to commercials. Many of us recall having used a dial to tune our radio to a specific radio station and/or program. Before the advent of the digital readout, there would usually be a tuning scale with a few numbers on it to help one find whatever specific channel one was looking for while tuning in on the radio. If you didn't know the exact frequency of the radio station, you would have to slowly turn the tuning dial back and forth until you settled on the best reception you could find. I know I gave up on my tuning a few times because I could not find a quality of sound, which was acceptable. Did you ever have difficulty tuning in on one of those old timey radios?

In the 1997 Science Fiction movie, “Contact”, Jodie Foster played the role of Dr. Ellie Arroway, who used arrays of radio telescopes to listen for messages from outside our planet. One very dramatic scene has her listening very intently to the feeds from an array of radio telescopes. She was dialing through a multitude of the frequencies of radio transmission in the hope that one day she would find a message from an alien world. It was a long and laborious task. Then, she finally discovered a message from the Vega star system.

It is not easy to stay focused while tuning in to an important message because there are many distractions vying for our attention! For example, one's thoughts might begin to wander – start thinking about all of the many things one should be doing, instead of trying to tune in on someone's message. Another temptation is to formulate one's response, instead of really listen to someone else's message. However, if one can successfully maintain one's focus on someone's message, a person might learn something, which has the potential of benefiting one's self or someone else.

So, who is the best person for us to tune in on? Having been a philosophy major at UT Austin during my undergraduate degree, I discovered a number of philosophers, who might be considered to be good candidates for being someone, we might want to tune in on. However, there is really only one Source that you and I – all of us need to tune in on! If the children were still present, I bet one or more of them would give the answer I am suggesting. The answer to the question of the best Person for us to tune in on is God. Although, I would also accept the response of “Jesus”.

The event we had performed before us earlier, which comes from the Scripture Reading about Jesus teaching in the home of Martha and Mary, is a good testimony to the reason you and I need to tune in to our Divine Parent and God's Son, Jesus the Christ. There is the temptation to perceive the situation in the skit and Scripture through the words of Martha. Yet, Martha was so busy and unfocused! Yes, it would be better if work was equitably shared among individuals. And yes, it is a great honor hosting the Messiah in one's home. And finally, yes, Martha relished exercising authority over Mary as the older sister. But, because Martha allowed herself to be so unfocused, she turned what was supposed to be a beautiful act of hospitality into scene where she made herself the focus of attention instead of Jesus.

Don't get me wrong, Mary also had her flaws during Jesus' visit. Tuning in to Jesus was good, as Jesus pointed out to Martha, but instead of showing compassion for her own sister, whom she tuned out, she seemed to have made her experience one between herself and Jesus, even though, there were guests in her home. The sibling rivalry between the two sisters and the question Martha posed to Jesus forced Jesus to respond as shown in our skit and Scripture. Yes, Mary was wise to tune in on Jesus' teachings and agape love. Yes, Martha was faithfully providing hospitality to Jesus and her other guests. But, neither sister was thinking about the welfare of the other. **Since Martha pressed her case against her sister in front of all of the guests, Jesus had no choice than to praise Mary's tuning in, for both sisters would have benefited greatly by focusing on Jesus, his message, and the New Life in Relationship with God.**

Let's take a moment to tune in to the type of life Jesus demonstrated and calls all of us to get in sync with. Let's say it starts off the same way as in our Skit/Scripture, but then, **Mary could have gone privately to**

Martha after recognizing her sister's devotion to fulfilling her hospitality and suggest they both tune in to Jesus and his message and that, after a little while, they would both carry out the hospitality duties. If Mary had acted in that way, she would have tuned in to Jesus, as well as, would have also lived out the agape love and invitation to the New Relationship with God he embodied!

In line with what I stated about the encounter between Jesus and the two sisters, Rev. Eric Elnes, Ph.D. wrote, "In Martha's day, she couldn't simply say, 'Oh, they're videotaping his talk so I'll just catch it later.' You couldn't even look up Jesus clips on YouTube. This may be the only opportunity she will ever have to hear Jesus speak in such a small, intimate setting."

Elnes continued, "Of course, Martha might object that it was out of her high respect for Jesus that she sacrificed her opportunity to sit at his feet and provide him a few figs and dates. Yet how respected do you suppose someone like Jesus felt to have someone essentially saying, 'I've got more important things to do than listen to what you have to say?' Is it not Jesus who once told the devil, '**Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God**' (Dt. 8:3; Mt. 4:4; Luke 4:4). And he said this after going without food for forty days!"

Reminding us that sometimes we need to be well rested and focused on our task, instead of on doing what is expected of everyone, Eugene Peterson wrote about a turbulent scene in Herman Melville's "**Moby Dick**" in which a whaleboat scuds across a frothing ocean in pursuit of the great, white whale, Moby Dick. The sailors are laboring fiercely, every muscle taut, all attention and energy concentrated on the task. The cosmic conflict between good and evil is joined; chaotic sea and demonic sea monster versus the morally outraged man, Captain Ahab. In this boat, however, there is one man who does nothing. He doesn't hold an oar; he doesn't perspire; he doesn't shout. He is languid in the crash and the cursing. This man is the harpooner, quiet and poised, waiting. And then this sentence: "**To insure the greatest efficiency in the dart, the harpooners of this world must start to their feet out of idleness, and not out of toil.**" (The Contemplative Pastor, 24 by Eugene Peterson).

Elnes suggested, "In each of our lives as individuals, **there is a time and place for rowing, and one for harpooning.** Sometimes, you've just got to **buckle down and trudge away with all your might.** Other times, you've got to **set down your oar, no matter how many people complain about your 'shirking your responsibility' to stop, breathe, look around, and listen.** Otherwise, you may miss whatever you were rowing so fervently to catch. Or worse, that which lies beneath the turbulent sea may come up from under you and overturn your boat." As an aside Elnes pointed out, "(That's a great metaphor for what our soul does to us when we're not attentive to it, by the way!)"

Elnes suggested part of our calling when he wrote, "**The story of Mary and Martha suggests a different approach: that instead of running about 'worried and distracted by many things,' we stop, breathe, look around, and listen carefully — listening to each other as children of God, and to God's Earth.**"

I join in Elnes' conclusion, "**Most of all, we are called to restore our connection to an unhurried God. We are called to 'sit at the feet of Jesus' — which for us is the Spirit of the Living Christ (Holy Spirit).** We sit quietly, **listening for the direction of the Spirit,** refusing to stand up and act until we've heard what we are being called to do. Then, because the Jesus who blesses Mary most certainly does not think we should only ever sit idly at his feet but take up our crosses and **follow him, we are called to act** once we have received direction. We are to take up our oars and row on a daily basis, just as we are called daily to set them down long enough to **reconnect with the Spirit** and follow our best and surest Source of Hope."

So, let's take our tuning in to God, especially through God's Son, Jesus Christ, very seriously. **Take the time, frequently, to sit at our Divine Parent's Feet in worship, study, prayer, service, and fellowship – to learn from Jesus' teachings and example of agape love. Implement that "tuning in" by living the New Life in Christ with his agape love toward everyone and by sharing God's Invitation and Welcome with all people! Tune in! Amen.**