**The Revd Dr Ian McIntosh, Director of Mission and Ministry, reflects on Luke 10.38-42 for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity, 20th July.**

It's very easy to make snap judgments about someone who we meet for the first time. The way they dress or speak, the colour of their skin, whether they have a tattoo, all these and more can lead us to unhelpfully pigeonhole people. At worst, this can lead us to fear those who are different, and not to offer the kind of welcome and hospitality that we should as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Jesus often told stories which address these fears of difference, and through them he challenged the way that all of us can pigeonhole others. However, today's gospel reading about Mary and Martha has often been used to pigeonhole people. So, we need to name that first before we might reclaim its power to challenge us. Women throughout the ages have lived with often male-generated interpretations of this passage. The supposed passivity of Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus has been extolled as a role model, and the busy domestic activism of Martha is often chastised.

This type of pigeonholing and binary distinction can be hugely unhelpful and diminishing. As a way of overcoming this, I found it helpful to see this story in the context of what Luke's Gospel is trying to say. Because in Luke's Gospel, Martha is doing exactly what the gospel wishes her to do.

She's welcoming the stranger, offering them hospitality, especially around meals, which Jesus so often used to tell stories within the context of. In John's Gospel, she is the disciple who matches Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah with her own confession: ‘You have the words of eternal life’. So, Martha is a woman of faith and courage who is intentional in offering the very hospitality that enables Jesus to minister, and his words to her are a reminder for all of us to see the hospitality we offer as part of being a disciple.

Mary, her actions were actually deeply subversive. She sat at the feet of Jesus, which subverted the traditions of the day, which meant that that activity was normally reserved for men only. Here as a woman, she intentionally places herself as a learner at the feet of Jesus, the rabbi. So, this is no passive disciple who shuns offering hospitality but is an active disciple who practices that in a way that would deeply challenge the religious pigeonholing of her day.

Up and down our diocese, I hear so many stories of people who have been pigeonholed and written off in the past, but who are discovering the treasures of God, which enables them to be a disciple. The work of Mustard Seed is about people who've been overlooked, living in places that are overlooked, finding their place at disciples, finding how they're valued, loved, and accepted by God, and how they can step up into mission.

And I've been personally very challenged by those whose stories of living life with addiction and homelessness have now found a new role joining in the mission of God through their local churches and communities. So, the challenge of this reading is Jesus's invitation to a lifetime of discipleship, which does not write people off. He embraced Mary and Martha into his most intimate set of followers and invited them, as he invites us, to see each other as children of God: all valued and all able to find a place in God's mission to the world.

Let us pray. Loving and generous God, we thank you that you value and include. You affirm those who are so often overlooked. Challenge us, we pray, when we have stereotypes of others. Teach us to learn of the gifts we can receive from those who are different, and build, we ask and pray, your multi-ethnic, multicultural, and very diverse Kingdom of God amongst us.

In Christ's name we ask it. Amen.