

“Fillers, Thrillers & Spillers-Flowers, Football and Faith”

Rev. Keith Johnston

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“Fillers, Thrillers & Spillers-Flowers, Football and Faith”. Call Psalm 100. Luke 10. 38-42 & 30-37

While Sally & I served a native church above the Arctic Circle, we were delighted to travel to Virginia to be at the birth of our first grandson, Liam. A few months later we gladly made the 22-hour journey again for Liam’s baptism! At that visit, our daughter-in-law, Megan, wanted to add flower boxes to their windows. Since it involved ladders & drilling, I gladly volunteered. After buying window boxes at Home Depot we ventured into the flower department. Megan didn’t know what flowers to buy until a helpful clerk gave this advice: **“EVERY window box should have FILLERS... THRILLERS...AND SPILLERS!”** Megan & I looked at each other, puzzled. We had never heard such terms! I was thinking daisies or pansies? The salesman patiently explained: “For balance and beauty chose flowers for each box that not only **FILL THE SPACE**, but also offer **A FEW THRILLERS** - awe inspiring choices to catch the eye. Finally, plant a few flowers to **OVERFLOW** from the box, **SPILLING** down the front!” **The key is ALL THREE TYPES** make a beautiful, complete array! The results were indeed a sight to see! Returning to Alaska, we didn’t need flower boxes. Sally & I were inspired to see **the first wildflowers fill the tundra** after a long, bone chilling winter! Soon after, our mountain valley was **overflowing** with wave after wave of amazing wildflowers! Window flower boxes are beautiful. Yet no one can match God’s creation in full bloom! Just drink in the wonder and splendor of this spring morning...

Pastors always look for sermon illustrations in daily life. Reading these two passages in Luke, we see Jesus encouraging **FILLERS, THRILLERS AND SPILLERS** in our walk of faith. Luke put these two encounters with Jesus side by side for a purpose. A core, Gospel message is expressed in this pairing. The parable of the Good Samaritan and Jesus’s visit to Mary and Martha **belong together**, guiding us to a more complete, balanced life of faith!

Mary and Martha represent the **“FILLERS AND THRILLERS” of faithfulness!** Martha is the ever gracious, hardworking disciple, making her home available to Jesus & 12 disciples. Hosting 13 tired & hungry travelers is a huge undertaking when all cooking is from scratch! Martha is the kind of Christian who works **behind the scenes** to make ministry happen. Such faithful service is essential to God’s work today. Thank God for **every** Martha we know who quietly, lovingly **FILL THE NEED!** How can our giving, our time and service **fill** desperate needs in this church & community right now...? **How will you be a FILLER this week, this year during the pandemic?**

We see Mary clearly **THRILLED** to be in Jesus’ presence and sit at his feet to learn from him! I think Jesus’ response to Martha’s complaint about Mary not helping is often misunderstood. Jesus repeats Martha’s name lovingly, yet is also clear that Mary’s devotion is good, and will not be denied her. In Jesus’ day women were not allowed to sit and learn from a rabbi. Our Lord here opens the door to women being in seminary and becoming pastors. Jesus may have been **the first to insist** “a woman’s place” reaches far beyond the kitchen! On the other hand, the problem is not at all Martha filling a need, but being **“distracted by many things.”** Jesus himself taught and practiced humble service. He washed the disciple’s feet at the Last Supper as a lesson on all discipleship. **“Well done, good and faithful servant”** is a word from Jesus we all wish to hear at the end of our lives. Yet a danger remains! We can become so busy and distracted working **for** God, we can **miss** God’s presence! That is a danger to pastors and all believers. We all need balance, keeping both **daily service for God & daily devotion to God alive!** Like Martha, Brother Lawrence discovered washing dishes for his fellow monks was a way to practice the presence of God. And like Mary, Lawrence was thrilled to pray & worship the Lord! Jesus patiently explains to Martha and to us, how **both** service & devotion are good!

Furthermore, no flower box, no church and no Christian is complete without **“SPILLERS!”** After the two great commandments to love God fully and love our neighbor, Jesus tells the Good Samaritan parable explaining all people are neighbors! Notice in the story that church leaders callously walk by a person in great need! And shocking the self-righteous then & now, it is the religiously despised Samaritan who **overflows** with God’s love to a total stranger...! *

YES, FILLERS AND THRILLERS ARE NEEDED, BUT INCOMPLETE! Unless the love of God **spills out** in acts of justice and compassion **our religion is counterfeit**. Amos the prophet shouts for God: “**I despise your solemn worship and religious celebrations! Let justice flow like a never-ending stream and right relationships abound daily.**” The Session of our new church voted to be a Matthew 25 congregation **and** an Earth Care congregation! God calls us each to **fight** deeply engrained racism, **work** to end poverty with just wages & equal opportunity as well as **care** for the good earth. **Remember, Matthew 25 insists** our response to others in need is our response to Jesus himself! Jesus insists faith must **SPILL out into the world** to be **true** faith!

Finally, if the flower illustration doesn't grab you, **how about football?** One of the many adventures I had in the village was coaching 8 player, coed, tackle football! It was a great way to connect with the youth. And in the Arctic where basketball rules, they needed a coach who had actually played football. One truth all coaches know is, **EVERYONE** is needed on a team. **FILLER, THRILLERS AND SPILLERS** **all** have a place! **FILLERS** are the offensive line and defense. They fill, sometimes literally fill, a crucial need without glory or attention. Yet if you truly love football, there is great joy in playing on the line or on defense! And there “in the trenches” games are often won or lost! **THRILLERS** of course include the quarterback, running backs and speedy receivers. They too play a crucial role on a team. Finally, **SPILLERS** remind me of the bold plays that break open a game. **Again, balance is needed.** When you can run the ball with 5 yards and a cloud of dust, those filler plays make possible the break through long pass or reverse. **One more true Arctic football story:** There were twelve boys who did not quit after all the long practices, **and** one girl who hung in despite the tackling and blocking. All 13 were fine athletes and excelled in basketball. However, the boys thought they knew football because they watched it on television and resisted my coaching. On the other hand, Mary, **yes her name was Mary**, not only had a lion's heart and never gave up, but also was so coachable. She listened & learned & improved. Mary's example led the other players to be coachable as we won the all-village championship game on a blue, Astroturf football field in Barrow, AK! The field was just across the street from the Arctic Ocean & polar bears had crossed the field!

In our faith, Jesus likewise coaches/leads us to a **complete** discipleship: Humble service like Martha fills needs. And be thrilled to sit and learn at Jesus' feet like Mary. Also reach out with compassion and justice toward the stranger and immigrant like the good Samaritan.

REFLECTION: Take a moment to consider taking a step to deepen your devotion to Christ like Mary... a new way to serve behind the scenes like Martha... & a boundary stretching act of justice/mercy like the Samaritan ..