

VICTORIOUS SECRET MODELS

Sermon, July 17, 2016

Texts: Luke 10: 38-42; Colossians 3:1-17

When we last looked at this Gospel passage three years ago, I told you how, much to my younger daughter's amusement (*we had just arrived home from my picking her up from school*), I found in our mailbox a catalogue from "Victoria's Secret" (*I smiled at Hannah and began singing, "I'm sexy and I know it ..."*). I don't know how they got my name and address (*hopefully needless to say, the catalogue was NOT solicited*), but there it was. I've learned that Victoria's Secret is THE largest American retailer of female lingerie; sales in 2012 totaled \$6.12 billion. The company was founded by Tufts graduate Roy Raymond on June 12, 1977. He got the inspiration for it after the awkward and uncomfortable experience of trying to buy some lingerie for his wife at a local department store ... he started out borrowing \$40,000 from his parents to establish a store where men could feel comfortable buying lingerie, which is probably why I, a male, got the unsolicited catalogue of female lingerie in the mail (*which promptly went into the recycling bin*). By the way, there's nothing British about Victoria's Secret other than the name; the faux-European look is a marketing strategy totally made in the USA. The London address on the catalogue cover is fake; the actual headquarters for Victoria's Secret is in Columbus, Ohio.¹ I'm told the original creator of the Victoria's Secret line of stores sold the company after five years for \$4 million to The Limited, tragically, not long after that, he committed suicide by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge.

But this sermon is not about *that* Victoria's Secret.

This sermon is about the *victorious* secret, the "secret" to living life well. Earlier in this chapter from Luke there was an expert in the law who wanted to learn this "victorious secret;" the secret of living life well, the secret of living the fulfilled life. When asked by Jesus, "*What is written in the Law? How do you read it? How do you understand it?*" he responded, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.*" "**Right!**" Jesus had replied. "*Do this, and you will live!*" I believe Jesus was giving an enthusiastic affirmation to a man who gave a really good answer. Jesus reply could be translated, "**Keep on doing this, and you will come alive!**" (*Matthew 22:37; Matthew records Jesus Himself giving these two commandments as summaries of the Law -- "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and Prophets."*) Note, the commandment to love God comes *before* the commandment to love our neighbors. This is an important part of the "secret." Years of pastoral ministry have confirmed for me that if we don't follow the first commandment first, we run the risk of two results: (1) We will inevitably make a mess of things, and (2) we will help and/or cause others to do the same. In other words, if we do not love God first and foremost, we will not love our neighbors well ... nor will we love our children, or our co-workers, or anyone else for that matter, well. The key to living well, the key to victorious living, the true "Victorious Secret," is to honor the two great commandments ... in their proper order.

In this morning's reading we read Jesus "*... came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him.*" As Jesus began to talk, Mary, one of the sisters who lived in the home, proceeded to sit at His feet and absorb every word He spoke. But the other sister, Martha, was busily at work trying to be a proper hostess while all the men, and her sister Mary, sat there listening to Jesus. I can imagine Martha in the kitchen banging the pots a little more loudly than necessary as she fumed over her sister Mary. Finally, she just couldn't take it any more, and she storms in and I'm sure with some exasperation blurts out, "*Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all of the work by myself? Tell her to help me!*"

When we've looked at this passage in years past, I pointed out that the typical commentary on this passage is critical of Martha, as if to say, "*Martha just doesn't get it. Mary knows what's important.*" But I think there's something about *Martha* that deserves our notice and even our admiration. I think if Martha had a last name, it may have been Stewart. She is a hostess! And she wants to be properly hospitable for her honored guests. And this is admittedly my conjecture, but I also think it's quite possible she is beginning to grasp the enormity of just Who Jesus is. Maybe it is dawning on her that Jesus really is somehow God incarnate, that the God of the universe has actually walked into *her* home, that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is *her* guest, and she realizes she has the immense privilege of serving Him. What an honor, to receive and serve and even feed ... God! So the hostess in her understandably wants to do the very best; for, to her, to do otherwise would be rude, inconsiderate, even a slighting of God. That's a commendable attitude! That's good! And I also think Martha has been listening all along to some of Jesus' clear teaching about service.

¹ Most of this information came from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria%27s_Secret

Remember, this passage follows Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, where Jesus apparently criticized the do-nothing "spiritual" priest and Levite who walked on by a man in obvious need while they were apparently on their way to do their religious "duties." In that parable Jesus *affirms* hands-on helping, He affirms active service in being a neighbor to those in need of mercy, He affirms the Samaritan who rolled up his sleeves and went to work, taking time and effort and energy and expense to help and serve. And earlier in this same chapter, Luke 10:2, Jesus said, *"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few."* He doesn't say the *listeners* are few; He says the *laborers*, those who really go to work, *they* are few. In other places Jesus said things like, *"Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things I tell you?"* It is clear that Jesus wants and desires and is pleased by service; hands-on, practical, doing-something service! The last thing He is going to tell any Martha is to stop serving. But He does want her to remember what not to lose sight of, to remember what else is of primary importance.

Some of us may relate easily to Mary who loved to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen while He talked. Others of us relate better to Martha who preferred to work for Jesus while all the talking was going on. But both are necessary! Pardon the pun, but both Mary and Martha put together are "victorious secret" models. We must love God and give attention to Him, *and* we must get busy serving Him and loving our neighbor. No, Jesus isn't condemning Martha. Rather, it is out of concern for those Marthas who have obeyed the call to work and serve that He reminds them of the importance of taking time to sit at Jesus feet ... to take time to nurture the relationship that gives you the reason and direction for the service and activity in the first place. *(As a bit of a related aside, we are blessed with many Marthas in this congregation. For a quick example, during a typical service of worship we have such Marthas repeatedly serving in the nursery and staffing our children's church ... please remember they need to be relieved once in a while by the Marys in our congregation so they can come up here and sit at Jesus feet in worship!)*

"Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her." The better part ... that's what the responsible Marthas can lose sight of in their faithful service.. Life has so many parts, doesn't it? There is the part about our responsibility at home to people who are counting on us, who depend on us. There is the part about our responsibility at work, at church, at civic associations. There is the part about our responsibility to friends, to our aging friends or our aging parents, our responsibilities to our children and grandchildren, and there is the part about being an informed citizen and a responsible voter. There is the part about our responsibility to care for ourselves through exercise and diet and health care *(which can become all consuming when our health starts to fail)*. At times it seems like we keep accumulating more and more parts to life, more and more responsibilities, and the pieces of our "life pie" keep getting sliced smaller and smaller, which permit less and less time with all of them, and you know what often happens ,, before long we don't feel like we are doing a good job at any of these particular parts, although all the parts are right and good and worthy of our time and energy, and that is when we start to frazzle, and tend to get prickly with others ... starting at home, like Martha with her sister Mary. And that is when Jesus ever-so-tenderly says, *"Keep your focus on the better part."* To attend to the better part is to make sure we take time to join Mary at Jesus' feet. It is to make certain our spirits are fed and nourished. This is to honor the first great commandment. As we come again and again to the feet of Jesus, week by week, day by day, all the parts of our lives start to become more united, more integrated, more "balanced" around the "hub" of the one Savior. And as a result, we have more motivation, more strength and energy and direction for everything else we do to carry out the second commandment, to love our neighbor.

In the little time we have remaining I want to quickly point out that Paul echoes this same theme in Colossians, *"Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."* Paul goes on to say that to effectively do that, we must do what we can to get rid of the wrong things. In fact, in verse 5 he says that we are to put to death *(literally, the Greek can be translated "execute")* certain things in our lives. *"Put to death sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry."* There is a sermon in itself here, but Paul basically exhorts us to do all we can to eradicate the attitudes and passions fostered and promoted and fanned into flame by that other Victoria's Secret! Sexuality is a wonderful gift from God; in its proper context, it is a powerful angel that can accomplish wonderful things. However, when powerful angels fall, they become the most destructive demons. This basic, core drive is quite often one of the first things to go off kilter when we don't honor the first commandment, especially in our sex-saturated culture. But again, that's another sermon.

As highlighted last week,² we were created to live in an environment of love, we were created to love and to be loveable. The victorious secret, the secret to living well, is to *"set our hearts on things above"* and love well by honoring the two great commandments ... in their proper order.

² See <https://greenwoodchurch.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/freed-to-serve.pdf>