

Abiding Time

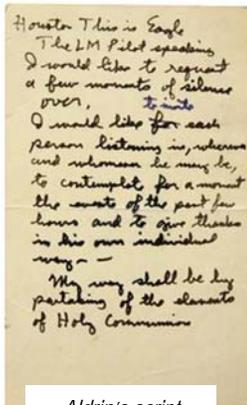
Sermon, July 21, 2019

Text: John 15:1-8; Luke 10:38-42

It was Sunday, July 20, 1969, 4:18 PM EDT, fifty years ago yesterday, and only thirty seconds of fuel remained in the lunar module. Astronaut Neil Armstrong then radioed from the surface of the moon, "*Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed.*" 240,000 miles away, Mission Control erupted in celebration as the tension broke; there were a thousand and one ways this operation could have gone wrong. A controller radioed back to the crew of Apollo 11, "*You got a bunch of guys here about to turn blue; now we're breathing again!*" At 10:56 PM, Neil Armstrong was ready to plant the first human foot on another world. I remember being with my five siblings and my parents as we all gathered around our black and white TV set, not realizing we were with more than half a billion other people watching on TV worldwide, as Armstrong climbed down the ladder, planted his foot on the dusty lunar surface and proclaimed: "*That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.*" As you know, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were the first men to walk on the moon.

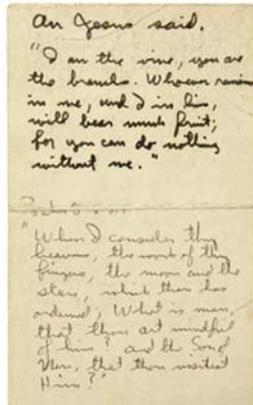
Buzz was born Edwin Eugene Aldrin, Jr. The nickname "Buzz" originated in childhood; his adoring little sister kept mispronouncing "brother" as "buzzer", and this was shortened to Buzz. In 1988, Aldrin actually took the steps to make Buzz his legal first name. For those of you who know the *Toy Story* movie series, space ranger Buzz Lightyear is named after him ("*To Infinity and Beyond!*"); the Pixar film makers believed Buzz Aldrin had "*the coolest name of any astronaut.*" Relatively few people know the largely untold story of the first meal eaten on the moon (*inside the lunar module, of course*). Buzz Aldrin, an elder in the Webster Presbyterian Church near Houston, Texas, had brought with him a tiny communion set given by his church; a silver chalice and wine vial about the size of his little finger. He radioed for all back on Earth to hear, "*Houston, this is Eagle. This is the LEM pilot speaking. I would like to request a few moments of silence. I would like to invite each person listening in, whoever or wherever he may be, to contemplate for a moment the events of the last few hours, and to give thanks in his own individual way. My way shall be by partaking of the elements of holy communion.*"

Buzz Aldrin, in the words of our previous hymn, wanted to take time to be holy.



Houston This is Eagle
The LEM Pilot speaking
I would like to request
a few moments of silence
over. ^{to invite}
I would like for each
person listening in, wherever
and whenever he may be,
to contemplate for a moment
the events of the past few
hours and to give thanks
in his own individual
way - -
My way shall be by
partaking of the elements
of Holy Communion

Aldrin's script



An Opener said,
"I am the vine, you are
the branches. Whoever remains
in me, and I in him,
will bear much fruit;
for you can do nothing
without me."
When I consider the
beauty, the unity of the
Bible, the moon and the
stars, what then has
remained? What is more
that than a handful
of flour and the cup
that the Lord visited
him?

He later wrote, "*I had intended to read my [entire] communion passage back to earth, but it was requested I not do this. NASA was already embroiled in a legal battle with Madelyn Murray O'Hare over the Apollo 8 crew reading from Genesis while orbiting the moon at Christmas. So in the radio blackout, I opened the little plastic packages which contained the bread and the wine. I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. Then I read from Scripture, 'I am the vine, you are the branches. Whosoever remains in me and I in him will bring forth much fruit, for you can do nothing without me.' I ate the tiny Host and swallowed the wine. I gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought two young pilots to the Sea of Tranquility. ... the very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the communion elements.*" Webster Presbyterian Church still has that little communion chalice, and Lunar Communion Sunday continues to be celebrated there annually the Sunday closest to July 20 ... which is today. (*the Psalm 8 note was read at the end of the mission*)

It's a tenet of our faith that God is present with us wherever we go. Buzz Aldrin set aside time to celebrate and acknowledge that Presence on the surface of the moon. Thousands of miles from earth, he set aside time to commune with the Lord he served, acknowledging his desire to abide in the True Vine, Jesus Christ; he took time to be holy. Now, hold that thought, as we leave the moon and come back down to earth to a little village called Bethany on the outskirts of Jerusalem, the home of Mary and Martha, from our second Gospel reading.

Last week in this chapter from Luke we read of Jesus' affirmation of the expert in the law who wanted to learn how to get his life right (*as explained in the sermon "Let's Ask the Right Question", the lawyer's question can be understood as "Jesus, what do I have to do to get or acquire a good and full life? What is it that I have to do to get my life right?"*) When asked by Jesus, "*What is written in the Law? How do you read 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!*" Jesus reply could be translated, "*Keep on doing this, and you will come alive!*" As pointed out last week, I believe Jesus was giving an enthusiastic reply of affirmation to a man who gave a really good answer. I want to quickly take time to note something I didn't highlight last week: the commandment to love God comes *before* the commandment to love our neighbors. This is important! Trust me on this ... if we don't honor the first, we won't to a very good job on the second. In other words, if we do not take time to be holy, to learn how to love and honor God first and foremost, and live accordingly, we will not love our neighbors well ... nor will we love our families well,

or our co-workers well, or even ourselves, for that matter. The key to living well is to honor both commandments, in order. And that takes time and effort and attention and discipline and dedication. Take time to be holy.

We read Jesus "... came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him." You know the story; we just read it, and we've looked at this passage together at least six times over the years. 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 and opening/closing the drawers a little more loudly than necessary as she fumed over her sister Mary. Finally, she just couldn't take it any more; she storms in and, I'm sure with some exasperation, blurts out, "*Lord, don't you care 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've always thought 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 personal conjecture, but I also think it's quite possible Martha 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! *(As an aside, that is an attitude that should govern all our hosting and interaction with each other ... we should host and greet and converse with people here as if we are hosting, greeting, conversing with Jesus, for in a way, we are! He lives within us. Thank you, by the way, to all who took part in hosting in just this gracious manner ... hosting like the Lord Himself was your guest ... during the reception following my son's ordination last week. You lavishly treated our guests as you would have treated Jesus, and not a few expressed their appreciation to me for the hospitality received)*

And I also think Martha has been listening all along to Jesus' clear teaching about service. Remember, this passage follows Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, where Jesus apparently criticized the do-nothing priest and Levite, both religious professionals, who walked by a man in obvious need and DID nothing. In that parable Jesus affirms hands-on 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 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! We must love God and take time to give attention to Him, *and* we must get busy serving Him and loving our neighbor. That's the summary of the Law! 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 be holy, taking time to honor the first commandment, taking time to sit at Jesus feet, taking time to nurture the relationship that gives you the reason and direction for the service and activity in the first place.

"*Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.*" Don't lose sight of this part, Martha. Life has so many parts ... 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, our aging parents, our aging spouses, 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)*. 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, "*Don't neglect the better part.*" To attend to the better part is to honor the first commandment first. To make sure we take time to join Mary at Jesus' feet. To commune with Jesus even if we are 240,000 miles away from home. It is to take time to make certain our spirits are fed and nourished. Take time to honor the first great commandment ... and as we do, we will have more motivation, strength and more direction for everything else we do to honor the second ... loving our neighbor as ourselves.