

Denice K. Leslie¹
May 14, 2006, Mother's Day
Luke 10: 38 – 42

Expanding in Grace

"Warning! When I am an old woman I shall wear purple with a red hat which doesn't go and doesn't suit me.

And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves,

And satin sandals and say we've no money for butter.

I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired and gobble up samples in the shops (at Costco and Trader Joes!) and press alarm bells—*

And run my stick across the public rails and make up for the sobriety of my youth...

But.....

maybe I ought to practice a little now?

So people who know me won't be surprised when suddenly I am old and start to wear purple."

This poem connects with a deep desire to recapture and celebrate that childhood sense of joy characterized by an ability to abandon one's adult self-consciousness and do pirouettes once more! –

And just plain be part of the fun loving side of God's grace.....

There's also a touch of rebelliousness in the poem announcing that once we grow old we've paid our dues and have definitely earned the right to snub social conventions.

But I think the larger truth of the poem's message is: We take ourselves far too seriously, and now that we are older, we KNOW it! And because we know it we want to make up for lost opportunity and correct the balance *while there's still time!*

We know it like Mary knows it—because we've all done our Martha thing—with deep commitment----

---Dutifully and with devotion we are or have worked, we are or have raised our children—and done our best to help them be decent, educated, law abiding citizens.

We have been or are community minded. We've volunteered, sold cookies, served on school site councils, administered charter schools in our spare time between 2-4 in the morning, applied for grants, built civic auditoriums, volunteered in community symphony orchestras, taught Sunday School, ----
- served as Sunday School superintendents, organized community libraries and church libraries in retirement—Been Scout leaders and Volunteers in Mission, pink ladies in the hospital guilds, and volunteer drivers for the Cancer Society.

We have sung in the church choir for years on end, played the organ or served on the Board of Trustees until we are blue in the face and turned to Jesus and said, *"Lord, do you not care that my sister (or brother) has left me to do all the work by myself?"*

(Pause)

Like the Lady in purple with the big red hat we suddenly awake to realize at midlife: there is more to life than devotion to duty--- We long to play!

It's time to include a few Mary style priorities in our lives: to sit at Jesus' feet, soak up God's gracious ever-present love and be a part of it—especially the FUN of it!

It's a wake-up call and it strikes people some where around 50.

I have so enjoyed this red hat! And the poem about the old lady wearing purple.

I realized this past year that my heart's image of God is a combination of Lucille Ball and my Scottish immigrant Grandmother!

My grandmother didn't wear purple but she did make her own hats and she LOVED to wear paisley! And wigs.

At the age of 92 she wore her favorite worn bright paisley dress and silver wig to my

¹Poem by Jenny Joseph, "Warning, When I Am An Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple." Souvenir Press * My additions.

wedding. My mother offered—begged and pleaded-- to take her out to shop—but she wasn't having any of that! She was going to do as she pleased and have a good time doing it!

Lucille Ball has delighted me since I was a child. Many is the time when in the midst of some mind sucking stress I have flipped through the TV Guide in search of an old "I Love Lucy" rerun and relaxed into the laughter and grace of Lucille's comic genius. Whether making chocolates or bouncing around in a trailer with rocks collected on vacation, Lucy's ability to make us laugh at ourselves is full of *God's amazing grace!*

People, have you ever considered what a sober-sided denomination we are as United Methodists? Our earnest desire to save the world has at times relentlessly led us around by the nose- as if we could build the kingdom single handedly with a fistful of social resolutions passed by Robert's Rules of Order and an intensely grim demeanor! Providing of course, we don't eat at certain places or drink certain currently forbidden products! That's okay—it has its place but in the larger scope of things children dying in Africa need more than our refusal to purchase a Coke product. So where was I?

I've discovered that one lovely thing about hitting midlife-and having fifty (and some!) years under ones belt is: We realize that for all our earnestness and efforts there really and truly IS grace!

There is a God in heaven who is still in charge. At 50 one knows we are going to leave this world with the problem of hunger only partially solved—with many of the-powers-that-be still in place for the next generation to do battle with! ---And whether we like it or not, with many idiots in positions of power.

But still in all, there's nothing like growing a little older to give one grace for idiots and even one's enemies—seeing them less as a united, conspiratorial front, and more as fallible individuals—why?? Why else? *Because we've finally had plenty of opportunity to experience idiocy and failure first hand: **our own!***

YES! There is NOTHING like growing older to help one appreciate God's patient, forbearing grace with the human species!

In the story of Mary and Martha Jesus models for us what God's grace is all about.

Martha is right, there is always work to do—many, many little tasks that make up daily living—often unappreciated and unseen but necessary—that require responsibility, energy and doing even when we don't feel like it: many things we do automatically—in our sleep or our grief or our perplexity or our nagging worries---or while planning or problem solving –basically while thinking of something else entirely—researchers call it multi-tasking!

But Jesus' response to Martha teaches us something God our Creator ALSO wants us to remember: Although all women are Martha, every woman deserves to be Mary.

(Pause)

Exactly because work IS never ending, Jesus charges us with the equal responsibility of breaking in on that pattern of constant necessity and making a space—a grace space—widening out a space for basking in our Creator's love! A space for experiencing rest, joy and play.

Of course we are no less earnest about our responsibilities and community commitments or our save-the world passions, nor should we be as God calls us to be involved in all of these things as well

---It's just that we realize our perspective is different when we are in Christ: Our discipleship walk with Jesus teaches us God's grace at work in us is kind of like one of these European sponges I buy at Trader Joe's---they come packaged all hard, flat and dry. But, when dipped in water, where they gradually become moist, soft and flexible—this little sponge expands! (Dip flat sponge in bowl of water and lift when expanded.)

God wants us to expand over our years—expand not only with age but with grace. Because the gift of age is the wisdom, the patience and the ability to love ourselves and others unconditionally that comes --not only with

an expanded waist line—but with an expanded grace line.

God's grace expands in us—hopefully—until we are so full we overflow with grace! So, think of it this way: when the water of baptism was poured over you, God's grace began its process of expansion in you!

After all—how else do you think God makes grandmothers???