

Sermon July 20, 2025

I love you to the moon and back!

James Webb Telescope revealed images of our universe that showed us things that we've never seen before.

July 16 1969, the whole world watched as we saw something that we had never seen before. Two astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were the first people to walk on the moon.

How many people here remember that day?

This was a big, exciting event, and the whole world watched a small step that became a big leap for all people. But something else exciting happened before they walked on the moon. Since everyone had already put in a full day's work with this new and technical operation of getting the spaceship on the moon, NASA had scheduled time after the landing for the astronauts to eat and get a goodnight's sleep before their big walking adventure. Buzz Aldrin arranged with his home church to carry a pinch of bread and a small chalice of wine so that in this remarkable place and in the midst of this amazing work, he could stop and express his gratitude and hope. There on the moon, Mr. Aldrin took time to remember that Jesus was with him.

Buzz Aldrin took communion on the moon.

Our Bible story today reminds us of the importance of recognizing that Jesus is with us. In this Bible story, Jesus is visiting His friends Lazarus and Martha and Mary. Martha is busy being hostess and getting the meal ready...and Mary is just sitting and visiting with Jesus. When Martha gets upset that Mary is not working, Jesus reminds her that welcoming is not just the serving of a meal but also the reception...the being with your friends. Jesus is our friend and He invites us to be present with Him.

So every time you look at the moon, remember that astronaut Aldrin took time there to share that moment with Jesus. And the next time you are in the midst of great work...or great play, you, too, can take a moment to recognize that Jesus is with you and to share your gratitude and hope with

Him. You can celebrate the presence of Jesus wherever and whenever and whoever you are.

Will you say a prayer with me? **(This is an echo prayer: the leader says a line and the children repeat it.)**

Thank You Jesus

for being with me.

Help me

to welcome You

and be present with You

wherever

and whenever

I am.

Amen

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

The Better Part

The God who created this amazing universe that we see unfurling in new ways... the God who created each and every one of us who walks upon this earth... and loves us all so much... and calls us to treat one another in the same loving way. Buzz Aldrin knew that nothing was too wonderful for our God as he carefully took the bread and cup through outer space, up to the moon, where he could remember the creator of the universe as he looked out at the beauty of the blue and green globe that we all call home.

Nothing is too wonderful for our God who comes to us in the most amazing and unexpected ways. And it is up to us to be ready.

For years, God saw the world as Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong saw it almost 60 years ago. Distant and beautiful. No indication of the hatred and divisions that still separate us. A perfect globe with beautiful vibrant colors.

But God was never content to stay far away. God has come to the people over and over again, trying desperately to be in relationship with us. But no matter how many times we try to make it happen, God doesn't come to us in Glory... as a King... on a cloud... in blasts of thunder and lightning.

No, God comes to us as a vulnerable stranger in need of help and hospitality.

Throughout Scripture, hospitality to strangers is an important theme. Sarah and Abraham welcomed three strangers who were really angels and were rewarded with their promised child. The only response to this sacred gift could be the cry: "Is anything too wonderful for our God?" When the Israelites wander in the wilderness, God provides them with manna and water, as a gracious host. When the refugees finally enter the promised land and settle down, hospitality is written into their holy law: "Love the sojourner," says the Book of Deuteronomy, "for you yourselves were once sojourners in the land of Egypt."

God came to the people again, not through angels, but as Jesus. God, through Jesus, lived a life just like we do, and experienced the best and the worst that people can do to one another. No longer separated through space and time.

Jesus teaches us that acts of hospitality actually show us something important about our relationship with God: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.... And whenever you do this for the most vulnerable person, you do it for me"

The Book of Hebrews points all the way back to Abraham and Sarah; "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers," it says, "for thereby some have entertained angels unaware."

So, Mary and Martha both knew the importance of extravagant hospitality, and I'm sure that's why Martha is scrambling to get everything just right

when she hears that Jesus and his friends are coming to town. She wants everything to be perfect, not just because it reflects well on her and her family, but because it is a biblical mandate.

Mary and Martha offer us two different ways to offer hospitality. Two different ways to welcome the strangers in our midst. Martha focused on the presentation – a clean house, a perfect meal, a restful environment for tired travelers. But, she was so busy, bustling around, that it doesn't sound like she ever spent time with her visitors. At least, until that moment when her anger at her sister overflowed and she exploded in front of everyone -which isn't very welcoming.

Now Mary, to be fair, could have helped a little more (I say that as someone who always wants people in my family to help more!), but she chose a different way to be hospitable. She chose to be present. To stay and visit with her visitors. To listen to them, to learn from them... to be a welcoming presence.

When Jesus tells Martha that Mary chose the better part, I don't think he was admonishing her for doing housework, but for her attitude. True Hospitality, he reminds her, requires the willingness and ability to create an open, empty space into which strangers can come, and find themselves at home.

To create a home away from home.

It's not that Martha's intent was wrong, it is that she forgot the most important part.

To be a welcoming presence.

To stop and breath and open her arms and say with a smile on her face: "welcome!"

We live in difficult times when the biblical mandate of hospitality is as vital as ever... where we need to look at how we welcome and treat the most vulnerable members of society... remembering that that is where we find Christ. My heart has been so heavy recently, and I have struggled with what I can say or do. But, I keep thinking that we as a people need to choose the Better Part.

There is a meanness in our society right now that scares me. A lack of hospitality that divides families, communities and friends. We are becoming

more divided and those divisions are seeping even into places of worship... places that should offer sanctuary and hope.

I worry... but I also pray and hope. I have faith that Jesus continues to be where the most vulnerable are, and that when we are called, we will choose the Better Part.

More than fifty years ago, we had the chance to see the world in a whole new way... the way that only God had seen it before... to see firsthand the wonderful works of God. And today, we are reminded that Jesus was there. Jesus was there on the moon. And Jesus waits at the Mexican border for asylum. Jesus is buried in the rubble in Gaza and Jesus is in captivity in Ukraine. Jesus thirsts at the Horn of Africa where the rains refuse to fall and hungers in Maryland, as food banks struggle to fill their shelves. Jesus is visiting in a small house in Bethany and resting his weary feet. Jesus is traveling dusty roads in Africa and Europe and Asia and across America. And Jesus is right here, right now, reminding us to love one another in a radical and everlasting way.

"I love you to the moon and back...

Go out and love one another in the same way...

Is anything too wonderful for our God?" Amen