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Mama Bear's Name is Martha
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It's a sunny morning
in the big forest
and the Bear family
is just waking up.

Baby Bear goes downstairs
and looks at the table
at his small bowl.....
it is empty.
"Who's been eating my porridge?!!"
he squeaks with all
the fierceness he can muster.

Next, Papa Bear
arrives at the scene,
looks into his big bowl
.....it is also empty.
"Who's been eating
my porridge?!!"
he roars and shakes the house.

Mama Bear puts her head
through the serving hatch
from the kitchen and yells,
"For heaven's sake,
how many times
do we have to go through this?"

"It was Mama Bear
who got up first",
"It was Mama Bear
who woke up everyone
in the house",
"It was Mama Bear
who made the coffee",

"It was Mama Bear
who unloaded
the dishwasher from last night
and put everything away",

Wondering why the sermon
is formatted this way?

*I was taught this technique by a
former White House
speechwriter and have written
my sermons in this format ever
since! I've found it helps me
preach without losing my place.*

"It was Mama Bear
who went out
in the cold early morning air
to fetch the newspaper",
"It was Mama Bear
who set the table",

"It was Mama Bear
who put the cat out,
cleaned the litter box,
and filled the cat's
water and food dish,

and, now that you've decided
to drag your selves
downstairs and grace
Mama Bear's kitchen
with your grumpy presence,.....
listen good.....'
cause I'm only going to say this
one more time.....
I HAVEN'T MADE THE
Darned PORRIDGE YET!!!!!"

Now, some of you
may be wondering
how I'm going to tie in
a three bears joke
with today's gospel.
And here it is,
I think Mama bear's
first name was Martha.

She has a lot in common with the Martha
Of our gospel story.
She's busy, overwhelmed
And has a list of tasks
that must be completed
to offer hospitality to her family.
Honestly, I feel sorry for her.

You know, most everyone
has heard the story
of Mary and Martha
countless times.

The sisters live in Bethany,
and are friends of Jesus
through their brother Lazarus.
Bethany is in Judea
and outside of Jerusalem,
and Jesus stops by
as he is journeying
toward that city.

The two sisters react
differently to Jesus' arrival.
Martha is concerned
with hospitality
and the completion of tasks.

Mary is concerned
with discipleship,
and sits at the feet of Jesus
to listen to him speak.

Now, anyone who has
ever entertained must have
secretly sided with Martha.

Jesus doesn't travel alone,
so entertaining God's son
means cooking
and possibly feeding dozens.
Food must be washed,
Cooked and served,
guests must be tended to,
seating and sleeping arrangements made
and of course, beverages served.

No wonder she becomes
anxious and frustrated –
she's consumed
with the tasks that are associated
with entertaining the messiah
and admittedly has lost sight
of the fact that the center
of the activity
is the messiah himself.

He sits and speaks God's word
and Mary is at his feet.

Now there are two
important things to realize
about this statement.

First, she is a woman,
and sitting with the male guests
may have been a social no-no.
But more importantly
is that sitting at the feet
of a rabbi, which Jesus was,
was an indication
of discipleship,
again a traditionally male role.

Perhaps this is what
has Martha so distracted.
Mary is claiming the role
of disciple,
dedicating her life
to following Christ
and sharing his word.

Jesus as
very aware
Of what is going on
in the hearts and minds
of those around him.

He knows when Martha
has reached the boiling point.
Like Mama bear,
she has finally had
enough and seeks to have Jesus
side with her and compel Mary
into the traditional role
of service and hospitality.

In her short comment
to Jesus she uses the word
“me” three times,
asking Jesus to support
her demand that Mary help her.
“Lord,” she says,
“don’t you care that my sister
has left me by myself
to do the serving.

It turns out
that Jesus doesn't care.
He believes that Mary
has claimed
The better portion.

Jesus does not have time
for social niceties.
He is not into traditional boundaries,
he is into setting people free.
Of the two , Mary has felt
the kingdom come near
and chosen to sit
in the presence of her savior.
She has chosen the better course.
And in focusing on the needs
Of culture and the world,
Martha has missed
an opportunity for dwelling
in the kingdom,
And she short changed herself
By missing the chance
to learn from God's son.

Joel Green writes that
"Jesus' encounter
with Martha and Mary
clarifies the welcome he seeks
not only for himself
but also for his messengers –
that is for all who participate
in the drawing near of God's dominion."

Hospitality for God's word
Requires attention,
Focus and the occasional
Repurposing of society's rules
and cultural norms.

And so, we must be alert.
Today's readings
are all about the possibility
of mere mortals
Entertaining God.
Like Sarah and Abraham

we may not be aware
that we are hosting the kingdom.

Or like Martha, we may be
Too distracted by the tasks
To revel in the guest of honor.

We are disciples
And our place
is at the feet of Christ,
Listening and learning
From his word.

Let us pray:

Eternal God,
You draw near to us in Christ,
And you make yourself our guest.
Amid the cares of our lives,
Make us attentive to your presence,
That we may treasure your word
Above all else,
Through Jesus Christ
Our Savior and Lord.
Amen.