

## Sermon for Proper 11, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity yr C

[Genesis 18. 1-10a](#)

[colossians 1.15-28](#)

[Luke 10.38-end](#)

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer.

Well here we are with 3 'Men' + Abraham and 3 Women -at least that seems to be how the Bible has it.

3 'Men' (or are they Angels?) who visit Abraham and Sarah under the oaks at Mamre, 3 Women Sarah, Martha and Mary.

Were these seven 'real people', or are they literary devices, characters devised to make a point, and given shape to make them seem real to the readers (hearers?) of the passage? At this distance in time, at least a couple of millennia, it's perhaps impossible to know with any certainty, and commentators take differing views.

They have been represented in art – Rublev's famous Icon depicts the 3 persons resting and taking refreshment under the oaks (perhaps they are, some have suggested, terebinth trees?) artists as famous as Tintoretto and Vermeer have painted Jesus in the House of Martha and Mary (A story incidentally only to be found in Luke's Gospel), and Sarah also has her images. Interestingly one I came across had the 3 Visitors, One was old with a Beard (A Father Figure?) while the other two looked young and clean shaven -make what you will of that!, so there are a few gallery visits for you to make, either in person or vicariously via the internet

We only get a shortened reading compared to some from Genesis, for we miss Sarah's response( Read the rest of the section yourself, it's rather dismissive, particularly if you come from a male perspective!) to the prediction that she will bear a son, and some commentators (though far from all) would argue that the 3 visitors will take a Trinitarian interpretation, something which later writers have made much of, perhaps making the passage carry more meaning than it was meant to bear – for the passage is ambiguous about whether there are 3 visitors or 1 - it seems to be the LORD who visits them, as 3 persons – how should we interpret this?. And we don't get to hear how Sarah responded to Abraham's behaviour, telling her how to make bread (something she probably knew more about than he did, but it was a Patriarchal society – note that 'the servant hastened to prepare it'( the calf) but a verse later it is Abraham who presents the Calf 'that he had prepared' - don't servants and women count for anything?? Now there's something to discuss!) Doing this cooking must have taken more than a few minutes, even if it was a stir fry, so delaying the visitor's journey – perhaps we do things in too much haste in Modern Times! What is, it would seem, clear is that Abraham takes the imperative of Hospitality, even in a place where he can't call upon friends and family for support, very seriously – is this

something for us to take to heart? One thing of the welcome we offer to refugees and asylum seekers.

And what of the story of Martha ( whose home it seems to have been? Was it in Bethany, as other Gospels would tell us? The village is not named in this account we just get ' a certain village' and Lazarus doesn't appear so are we secure in assuming that it's Bethany and the same Martha and Mary as appear in other places?— is there more to be said about women's ownership of property at that time?, was she married or a widow?) and Mary (was she young, unmarried, as is often supposed,?) – it's become commonplace to interpret the story as placing more emphasis on the spiritual ( Listening to the Lord) than on the material, when in truth we need both – humans need both physical and spiritual sustenance if they are to develop properly, but perhaps not an elaborate meal, simple food will suffice. Martha seems to have been in some ways the leader-her approach to Jesus is quite direct, critical even, when she asks Him to tell Mary to help – and she seems concerned with the practicalities of life, making sure that her guests (how many?-the reading just mentions Jesus, what happened to the rest of the group?) are fed, rather than conversing with them /him. I recall, many years ago, going to a gathering at the house of a colleague who happened to be from a Sikh background, her mother only appeared from the kitchen in order to check that we had enough to eat and were eating enough. ( a weeks fast was to be advised before the event!) Perhaps we see this again here? Some commentators have felt that the whole story is created by the Gospel Writer as an illustration of the First Commandment, matching that for the Second Commandment, which, in the Gospel, we've just had in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which was last week's Gospel.

So there – as usual I've left you with a lot of questions and very few, if any, answers. What I hope to have done is leave you open to interpreting the readings in your own context, to finding in them meanings and issues which you can use to inform your own actions – so whether you see them as 'Real People ' or as exemplars, may they act as guides for you in your life and in your dealings with others.

Remember what the Writer of the letter to the Hebrews wrote, something which seems to have informed our people in both Genesis and Luke:

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. *Hebrews 13:1,2*