

There is a long running list amongst my sisters and I of movies I never should have been allowed to watch as a kid, but somehow *did*. One of my family's favorite stories is when my cousins came to visit, both of whom were older than me, and *Pretty Woman* came on the tv at my grandparents' house and my aunt and uncle made them leave the room. My five year old self was allowed to stay. Why? Because I'd already seen it! As I've gotten older and looked back on some of these movies, I usually am the one adding to the list, and in this week's addition of movies I shouldn't have watched as a tiny tot, I give you *City Slickers*. Rated PG-13 and I probably saw it by the time I was seven.

I *love* this movie. It is Billy Crystal at his best. If you haven't seen it, the basic premise is that Billy Crystal, Mitch, is deep in the age 39 mid-life crisis. He's miserable at work, life has no meaning, which is making his marriage terrible, and everything is just awful. His friends, Bruno Kirby and Daniel Stern, gift him with a trip for the three of them to a cattle drive from New Mexico to Colorado. They can be real, old-fashioned cowboys. He says no, because they have a trip to go see his in-laws in Florida, and then the mid-life crisis peaks because his wife tells him she doesn't want him on their trip, so he needs to go rope some cattle.

The whole thing is a mess and their orientation is filled with mistakes and typical city folk attempting to rough it in the country antics, and then they meet their trail boss, Curly, played by a weathered and raspy Jack Palance. He is a legit cowboy, he's hardened and serious and doesn't have time for this city slickers messing about and making a joke of what is actually a serious and difficult job. At one point, Mitch gets paired with Curly to go off on their own and find some stray cattle and Mitch is petrified, certain this man is going to kill him and act like a rattlesnake bit him or something, but what happens is actually the opposite...

Eventually they break through their barriers and have a real conversation. Curly tells Mitch about the love of his life, a woman who only saw at a distance but never met, and Mitch is horrified, because couldn't life have been even better if he'd talked to her? They end up having a conversation about purpose and meaning and what you're looking for out of life and eventually Curly asks Mitch, "Do you know what the secret of life is?" Mitch of course says no. And Curly just holds up his finger, and of course, this is a Billy Crystal movie, he goes, "Your finger?" Curly's response is, "One thing, just one thing. You stick to that and everything else don't mean...stuff." Mitch is kind of baffled but wants to know, "What's that one thing?" The answer, "That's what you gotta figure out."

So here's what we're going to do really quick. Get out something to write with and either on your bulletin, a piece of paper, anything you have, think about it and then write down your one thing. If you had to define it, what would be your secret of life? What is your one thing? Ok, just set that to the side, but keep it handy and let's dive into the gospel here for a sec.

After his mic drop moment with the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus needs a little time to chill, so he and the disciples make their way to Bethany so they can rest at Mary and Martha's house. From the culmination of knowledge we have from the gospels, we know that this is also Lazarus' house, a place where Jesus frequently sought respite. These three siblings were ardent supporters of Jesus' ministry, providing him with funds, supplies, and a place to rest his head when things get too hectic. They are his friends, this is an established relationship, so even though, yes, they know he is their Messiah, their Lord, he and the disciples are also their people, the people they can hang out with and find peace with.

Now, it needs to be said that in ancient cultures, hospitality was a *vital* part of life. When you're operating in an honor and shame society, making sure that your guests are cared for and have everything they need is a quick way to keep your honor and avoid shame. Our first lesson is a great example of it. Visitors show up and Abraham is suddenly asking Sarah to be

a bread kneading machine and he's a butcher. It's part of how they live out intentional welcome and make sure that their guests know that they are honored and their presence is appreciated. Let me say this off the jump, there is *nothing inherently bad* about what goes down here, it's more a lesson in perspective, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Jesus gets there and he and the disciples seem to be chilling. Jesus is talking and teaching and sharing stories and Mary is just enraptured. She sits at Jesus' feet and is just captivated by his every word. All the while, Martha is running around like the world is on fire. We don't know what her many tasks are, but it seems like it has something to do with hospitality and making sure everyone is taken care of. Martha is the mom who spends all day making Thanksgiving dinner and then eats it standing up in the kitchen because she wants everyone to sit down and enjoy it. But then is also the mom that gets annoyed that everyone isn't immediately ready and raring to go to help clean up...and so...she takes her grievance to Jesus.

In an epic, Martha, sweetie, read the room fail, Martha assumes Jesus will be on her side and goes to him and says, umm, Jesus, aren't you bothered by the fact that my sister here is just lounging around while I'm hustling to make sure that everything is taken care of? Obviously you're bothered, so tell her to help me! I would *love* to have been a fly on the wall

here, because number one, I want to hear Jesus' tone when he responds, and number two, I want to see everyone else's reactions. Jesus goes full on Jack Palance cowboy on her, Martha you are worried and distracted by so many things, but you don't need much, actually only one thing, your sister seems to get it, take a beat, take a breath, and see what's around you. Or as Curly put it, "You city folk...you worry about a lot of *stuff*...you spend about 50 weeks a year getting' knots in your rope and then you think two weeks up here'll untie it for you," followed by the one thing speech. Jesus isn't saying hospitality and welcome should be ignored, but he is telling Martha to recognize what's going on around her. What is more important? Making sure the house is clean for guests, or sitting and listening to your Lord talk? Spending time with family and friends and being one with them?

I'll admit, this gospel hits hard from multiple directions for me, because while I am the queen of sitting and not hustling around with the chores, I am also a master of worry and distraction. I might be sitting down, but my head is spinning with the 8,000 things my anxiety likes to worry about. We've all got some variation or combination of what's going on with Martha, right? Maybe your version is the house has to be immaculate and even if it is when company comes you tell them to not mind the mess. Maybe your version is the one abiding in the world we have created that

feeds off of distraction, you sit down and then wonder where the last hour went while you doomscrolled through your Facebook reels. Maybe your version is like mine, you can sit, but you can't stop worrying. Maybe it's a little bit of all of it, you want to rest, you want to sit, but your mind keeps jumping to the next thing and the next thing and you know the rest will only come once all the things are done, while you also know all the things will *never* actually be done. In a lot of ways, we have evolved into this, created a world that demands this kind of mentality and action. If you aren't busy, you're missing out. If everything isn't perfect, you've failed. If you haven't done all the things, you're lazy. If you do actually rest, it's mindless. And it's hard to fight against that, but...Jesus and Curly call us to focus in...to focus in on that one thing. The difference is though that while Curly tells Mitch he has to figure it out for himself, we can kind of figure out what Jesus means when he says it to Martha. The one thing is abiding in him.

It isn't that everything Martha is doing isn't important or necessary, but she's failing to see that Jesus is *right there*. She is wholly focused on other things, rather than letting his presence transform everything else, her worldview, her heart, the tasks at hand. Maybe she doesn't have to act exactly like Mary because that isn't her, but she can still be present, abiding in Christ, while feeling fulfilled in her purpose, but she is seeing it as very

all or nothing, and that just isn't how Jesus necessarily rolls. We have the ability to abide with and for Jesus in everything we do, but it takes a mindfulness, a hopefulness, a willingness to see the world through the eyes of where Jesus is and how Jesus is operating, even amidst the mundane or the busy or the chaotic, because he is there, but our tunnel vision must get it all done or totally zone out doesn't allow us to see where he is in the midst of our lives all of the time. Yet to see him, everywhere, anywhere, in all things, that is the one thing.

I want you to get your piece of paper back out with your one thing written on it. The question here isn't if your one thing is Jesus or not, the question is, how can you abide in and with Jesus through your one thing? When you think about that thing where is Jesus present? How are you Jesus' hands and feet when you are in that space? How is your faith showing up in the midst of the one thing? Ultimately, in the midst of our crazy, hectic everyday lives, where is God? Are we rushing around knowing God's there, but going so fast God is just a blur? Or do we know the busy, the chaos is going to happen and do we intentionally make sure we recognize where God is when it does? The secret of life is one thing and that one thing is going to be different for all of us, but what is the same for all of us is that God is in that one thing, if only we're able to see. **AMEN!!!**