

Luke 10:38-42

Jesus Visits Martha and Mary

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him.^[a] ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's^[b] feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰ 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." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—indeed only one.^[c] Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Martha and Mary were both devout followers of Jesus, who loved the Lord, would witness to his resurrection, and would spread the Gospel to people far and wide. In this passage, Martha and Mary host Jesus in their home. Hospitality was taken very, very seriously in the ancient middle east, and Martha begins to busy herself with serving Jesus, likely making lots of food and ensuring everything is just perfect. This being the time before microwaves and packaged food, hosting was a lot of work. Bread had to be made by hand, and food cooked over fire, not a glass top stove. Further, there were no dishwashers.

Martha grows resentful that she is left to carry the burden of serving alone while Mary is absorbing herself in the teachings of Jesus. Martha wants Jesus to intervene, to prod Mary into helping, because what better way to win a squabble with your sibling than to have the lord himself tell your sibling they are wrong, but Jesus does not do so. Instead, he calls upon Martha to consider her priorities, to consider what is really needed, and perhaps to come and sit at his feet as well.

Most of us can probably relate to Martha at some point or another. Perhaps you host a large holiday gathering, and spend all your energy on pulling it off without a hitch and before you know it, the holiday has passed you by. Or maybe you make all the vacation plans and keep everyone on schedule to the point that you need a vacation from your vacation. Or maybe, you spend so much time keeping the church up and running that you find you don't have time to really worship, that service is more exhausting than it is renewing.

You would not be alone. In fact, the modern Christian has a very full schedule, especially on Sunday. There is coffee to be brewed, ushering, and a hundred little tasks to get the building open and ready for use. And there seems to be no end to the serving. There is a constant need for volunteers to help with an endless list of projects. In fact, busyness in the service of the church has become one of the defining characteristics of the modern Christian life. Much like Martha, there is much serving to be done, and it seems too few hands to pull off the plans that we make. Like Martha, we can be caught up in our service and our busy schedules, feeling tired and resentful. Our souls thirst for God's healing waters, but we are just too busy to drink from the well. Church begins to feel like work, and worship like a performance, and we are the busy stage hands trying to make sure the show goes on. I'm sure that I am not alone when I say that sometimes it's hard to feel worshipful when there are so many responsibilities on Sunday. Like Martha, we are overworked and drained, concerned with many, many things.

Mary, however, chose a different path. She instead goes and sits at the feet of Jesus and learns all she can. Her posture indicates that she is learning as a disciple learns at the feet of a Rabbi, something which would have been unheard of for a woman. While Martha is busying herself with the more traditional role of hostess, Mary is discovering a new thing, and growing

closer to her Lord. When Martha tries to involve Jesus in this sisterly tiff, Jesus gently tells Martha that she has worked too hard, making a fuss when only a little was needed, and that Mary has chosen the good portion.

Mary chose to learn from Jesus first. She chose to focus on her own faith and discipleship over making a big feast. She chooses to do only what is needed, maybe a simple meal and water, so that she may spend time learning from Jesus, and Jesus tells us that this is the good portion. This was the most important thing that Mary could be doing, focusing on her own faith journey. Service was also necessary, yes, and Jesus does not tell Martha to abandon all service but instead teaches her about priorities. Was a feast really necessary at the expense of her own spirituality? Or would a simple meal and sitting next to Mary have sufficed?

In the modern church we are programmed to the extreme. Especially as church membership declines, there is plenty to be done and seemingly ever fewer hands to do it. Service is important, it is how we serve God's people in the world, but are we also taking the time to sit like Mary at the feet of Jesus? Do we take the time to pray, to read Scripture, to learn from Jesus, to do the things which deepen our faith and discipleship and move us closer to God, or are we so overburdened that we think just don't have the time?

The truth is, just as it was for Mary, there is nothing more important than deepening our own discipleship and faith. There is nothing more important than growing closer to and learning from God, because that is where it all begins for the Christian. We cannot be effective in ministry, if we do not know the God we seek to share with others. We cannot love God's people if we have not first experienced the love of God for ourselves. We cannot lead

others into relationship with Jesus if we do not have a relationship with Jesus of our own.

You have heard me say that the way that churches grow is when its members live the Christian life, a life that is different from what the world offers, and others see that life with its love, its hope, and its peace, and want it for themselves. Unfortunately, all too often people see little different in the Christian life. If all we have to offer is a list of chores, it is no wonder that people would not be interested. If all the world sees is “busy Martha”, overworked and resentful, Martha who is too busy to grow in the Lord, whose life does not demonstrate peace and love, but chaotic schedules and resentment, if that is all the world sees, they rightfully will not want that. But the busyness of Martha is not what the Christian life is all about. The Christian life should involve far more sitting like Mary and living more like Jesus every day. And when we are listening to Jesus more closely, then we will know what service is needed. Mary served too, just in different way. She did not fuss with feasts and hosting, but instead, with honoring the Lord and preparing his body for burial. Because she had first listened to the Lord, she knew what was needed, and how best to serve.

I am constantly amazed and grateful for the service that I see here at Trinity. Though we be small, we be fierce when it comes to service. Martha would be quite proud of us. But let us not forget to sit at the feet of Jesus as well, to focus on our own discipleship as our first and greatest priority and the rest will fall into place. Sometimes we may discover that the grand feast we want to prepare leaves us with no time to sit at the feet of Jesus. In those times, much like Martha, maybe we prepare but one thing, so as not to neglect to feed our souls.

Today, sitting at the feet of Jesus will look different for all of us. Perhaps you find that you need time to study Scripture. Or

maybe you feel closest to God while singing or listening to hymns. Maybe contemplative prayer refreshes your soul. For me, when I feel myself becoming too busy, when worship becomes work, I head either to the monastery or out west to be surrounded by God creation. It is there that I can let the many things go and focus only on what is needed, and in the quiet, I can sit at the feet of Jesus.

There is plenty of work to be done in this broken and hurting world. There are abundant opportunities for service. We need both the service of Martha and discipleship of Mary to be effective for God, however. If you are feeling distracted with much serving, and anxious about many things, I invite you to let go all but that which is necessary, which is usually quite a bit less than what we're doing, and sit at the feet of Jesus. Sometimes it's been so long since we rested that we can forget how, we can forget how to stop and how to draw close to Jesus. If that is the case for you, know that you not alone, and I would be happy to help you discover how you best draw close to Jesus.

Only when we are listening to Jesus, walking with him, will we know what is truly needed, and then can serve in a way that gives life to ourselves and others. May we learn to sit at the feet of Jesus like Mary, so that our souls will be refreshed and renewed in the Lord, and then together we might better serve the Lord.

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