

Written Copy For: Are You Mary or Martha? Luke 10:40-42

Proper 11: 6th Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday July 21st, 2019

Text: Luke 10:40-42

⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

⁴⁰ Now Martha was one who was being greatly distracted and troubled (being too busy) concerning all that must be done in serving as a hostess. So after suddenly coming to stand beside them she said: "Lord: is it not a concern to you that my sister has abandoned me to serve as hostess by myself? Therefore command her so that she might join with me in doing her share!" ⁴¹ The Lord answered her saying, "Martha, Martha, you are being overly anxious, distracted, and showing your agitation concerning many things, ⁴² however necessary is only one thing; for Mary has picked out for herself the good portion which will not be taken away from her."

Exegetical Statement

As Jesus and the disciples are traveling, He comes to Bethany and meets Martha who invites Him into her home. She intends to provide a meal and hospitality for Him. After He arrives Mary, who has been helping Martha, comes and sits and Jesus feet, as a student sits at the feet of a teacher. This causes Martha to be agitated and troubled, seeing herself as being abandoned to do all the work of preparation by herself. She is too busy and too distracted by all she feels must to be done to listen to Jesus teach. Finally she suddenly stops what she is doing to come and stand beside Jesus, and says to Him: 'Don't you see Mary has abandoned me to do all this work by myself? Don't you understand that she should be helping me? Command her to do her part so together we might finish the preparations for your visit!' Jesus gently responds to Martha pointing out that in her distraction and agitation she has missed what is truly important. The Word that Jesus shares is what is truly important right now. The preparations and meal can wait. These things are not wrong, they are just not what is important right now. There is a time for all things, and right now what Jesus has to tell both women is what is most important.

Focus Statement:

Jesus promises to come to us every time we study His Word and gather together for Word and Sacrament Worship. He provides us with the best portion-the Gospel Message that brings us into His kingdom and keeps us there in the midst of all the distractions in this life that seek to steal us away. In Word and Sacrament, we are empowered and directed to serve others as His Church

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

There are many things that can distract us from the "good portion" of time spent with Jesus in study of His Word and His presence in the Sacrament. There are those things that we do for Him in His kingdom as well as those things that are high on our agenda. We can relegate Jesus and His Word to a place of lesser importance especially when our lives become busy and we become distracted with "much serving"

What the hearer should do as a result:

When our lives get busy with either ministry for Christ or the things we must do as a part of our daily lives we need to put time with Jesus as of first and foremost importance. Through this we are empowered and directed to live our lives in service to Him.

Subject Sentence: The Church needs both Mary and Martha in proportion

In our Gospel Lesson today we have presented for us two sisters: Mary and Martha. I want you to take a moment and consider this: who are you more like? Are you more like Mary in how you live your life? Or are you more like Martha? (*Pause for a few seconds*). How many of you would say Mary? Raise your hands. How many of you would say Martha?

Now in truth who you identify with depends on several factors. First off some of you are more the get up and go type like Martha. You are task oriented. You want to get the job done and do as good a job as you possibly can, both for your own satisfaction as well as for the good of others. And this is very commendable. When others have given up and are sitting around talking, or possibly haven't even begun to help, you are still plugging away. Perhaps you can relate to the feelings and agitation that Martha experienced as Mary stopped helping her and went to sit down at the feet of Jesus. Perhaps you know firsthand what it's like to be a Martha who wonders just how she is going to get all this work done! How much easier it would be if you only had some help. Perhaps you often thought about walking up to those who are sitting down on the job and saying, "Don't you care that I'm left to serve all by myself?"

Others of you are naturally more like Mary. You are a contemplative sort. You find it important to sit and listen to others, to engage in conversation and make others feel welcome. You like to sit quietly and listen and learn new things. You realize that we can become so busy and so wrapped up in work that life passes us by before we know it. And this too is commendable.

But another factor in your choosing who you should be like is which sister you perceive to be in the right. Which one appears to have Jesus blessing, and which one is Jesus correcting? Well, as we look at the text, we never see Jesus tell Mary to get up and get back to work. On the other hand we never see Him tell Martha to "Shut up and sit down." But Jesus does make this comment about Mary's choice: **Luke 10:42 "but one thing is necessary; Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."** So then we should all endeavor to be like Mary all of the time and avoid being like Martha; right? Well; not so fast.

Jesus comes to Martha's house at her invitation. He accepts her offer in which she was going to act as the host. Jesus often relies on others for His meals and Martha more than likely invited Him over intending to serve Him one. And Jesus is not opposed to women providing meals. **Luke 4:38-39** ³⁸ **And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf.** ³⁹ **And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them.** Jesus didn't heal her so she could sit down and listen to Him, instead He healed her so she could show her love and gratitude by being a good hostess toward Him and the disciples. Behind Martha's business is her desire to honor Jesus with good meal. Her efforts speak of a work of love. And when Jesus addresses Martha's exasperated cry for help He does so with love and compassion **Luke 10:41** **"But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things,"** Jesus knows how Martha feels and validates those feelings as being real. If He didn't think it proper that Martha provide a meal don't you think He would've said that up front before she had started work on the preparations? And He desires to alleviate those anxious and troubled feelings that she has, but not in the manner that Martha thinks they should be alleviated.

So; are you a Mary or a Martha? Who should you be more like: Mary or Martha? Consider this: what would a church full of Marys be like? We would have great attendance at worship every Sunday. After all this is the place we come to sit at the feet of Jesus. He promises to be truly present with us in a manner He is not any other time: truly present in the Word and the Sacraments. Worship is a special time, a holy time. We show this to be the case in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod by the paraments we dress up the Sanctuary with, in the way that pastors dress in an Alb and wear a stole that matches the paraments according to the liturgical color of the church year. Through the singing of hymns, the responsive reading of Scripture, the reciting of the Creed, through the prayers and the confession. All this is a signal that something different from every day life is going on here. Something supernatural is going on here. This is as close to sitting at the feet of Jesus as we can get this side of eternity. And if all were Mary all would be ready and willing to be there every Sunday.

And not just on Sunday. Any Mary would understand that when we read and study God's Word, we are being taught by Jesus Himself through the Holy Spirit who is always present when we read the Word. All who are Mary would be sure to take advantage of group Bible Study where Jesus promises in **Matthew 18:20** "**For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.**" Bible Studies would be very well attended as people set aside time in their busy schedules to study Jesus' Word. And when they weren't doing it here, they would be having private devotional time at home.

But a Church full of Marys would never get beyond sitting and listening. They would never actually go out and do what Jesus tells them they should be doing as beloved children of the Father. After the Marys heard last week's Gospel Lesson on the Parable of the Good Samaritan they would nod their heads in agreement, say a loud "Amen". Then they would go back home until it was time to do it all over again next week. They would be just like the Priest and the Levite, walking right past the man in need that God had put in their path. Instead of being the Church that reaches out to the lost with the Gospel we would become the Private Society of Mary. You don't have to go very far to see this happening already to Churches in and around us.

But what would a Church full of Martha's be like? Instead of sitting here listening to Scripture readings, hearing the Gospel proclaimed in Word and Sacrament we would be out there doing it-being the Church. I had a friend who once upon a time thought that this is the way the Church should be. He had the opportunity to be involved in starting his own congregation. They gathered together for a short devotional time where a passage of Scripture was read, usually concerning sharing the Gospel with the lost, then they had an exhortation to go out and save people from dying without faith. Following this they said a prayer and headed out into the neighborhood to be the Church. But this new Church didn't last very long. The members, especially my friend, became worn out and disillusioned with all those who refused to hear the Gospel. Feelings of disappointment over not seeming to make a difference, along with anxiety over the problems that fill all our lives brought him to a place where he began to question his faith. It seems that being too much Martha and not enough Mary is detrimental to one's spiritual health and faith.

And the world has an affinity for the Marthas. It presents to us all kinds of things that we can fill our lives with in the name of fun, fellowship, and building one's career, that is not compatible with a Mary lifestyle. Friends come in from out of town and we hate to leave them home alone on Sunday morning and we don't want to offend them by inviting them to Church. We go away on a trip and while we may pass churches along the way, pass LCMS congregations, we don't visit. We are too busy enjoying vacation. And besides we've never visited there before. Stopping in might be uncomfortable. Now one weekend away from worship doesn't mean that you are on the verge of losing faith. But one weekend away can easily lead to two, or three, or more. I'm sure many of you can think of a friend whose regular attendance is anything but. Attending church and Bible study is a habit for many. And in the same manner not attending can become a habit too. And that would be just fine with the world that surrounds you as well as the prince of darkness whose demons are always speaking to the sinful desires of your heart.

So what is the answer? Should we be more like Mary or Martha? Those of you who sat in on Rev. Art's Bible Study this morning knows the answer. The Church needs you to be both Mary and Martha. As **Ecclesiastes 3:1** says "**For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.**" There is a time to be Mary and a time to be Martha. And there is a correct order in which to do so.

Fellowship and meals and outreach are important to the life of the Church and to each of us who are members thereof. But we can't go out and serve empty handed. It's hard to share our faith when it is weak and hurting. So before we go out and be the Church we need to gather here and do Church. We first must be Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. We need to confess to Him our reluctance and inability to be the Good Samaritans He tells us to be. We need to confess all the ways we have failed to love Him and love others with our thoughts, words, and actions. How we have found other things more important than sitting at His feet.

And then over and over again we need to hear that He forgives us. We need to hear and even more so believe that He was the Martha we could never be. He spent His life ministering to others out of love. He gave His life to minister to you: to forgive you of all of

your sins, of all the ways you fail to love God and love others. In the Scripture readings, the hymns, the Creeds, the sermon you should hear over and over that all the sin in your life has been forgiven.

You need to hear that you are declared by the Father to be in right standing with Him. It's just as if you perfectly reenacted the Good Samaritan Parable in thought word and deed, even though the reality of your life and my life says something quite different. We are declared to be right with the Father because of our faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. We receive the credit for all the Martha deeds He did perfectly. He gives them to us in our Baptism through the gift of faith. And through that we are empowered to go out and be Martha in the community. To go out as the Church to places like Franklin Mission as well as to those who through our vocations we come into contact with. To go out and be a Good Samaritan to those in need that the Heavenly Father puts in our path.

Being Martha is hard. And you will become discouraged. You will see some of your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who could be helping yet seem like they are not. And you may be moved to say to Jesus as Martha did in Luke 10:40 "**Lord, do you not care that my sister (or brother) has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.**" And Jesus will say to you as he did to Martha in **Luke 10:41-42** "My son, my daughter, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Sit down and be Mary for a while. Choose the good portion: choose to bask in my love and my comfort that comes through Word and Sacrament to restore your faith and build you up in the faith. This is my gift to you here so that your faith will not be taken away from you." He calls you here to sit at His feet to be Mary for a while so that He can lift you up and strengthen you to go be Martha, to go be the Church. After which He calls you back to rest at His feet again.

The Church needs you and I to be both Mary and Martha. What percentage of our lives should be lived out as one or the other? I can't answer that. Only Jesus can. And He will do so when you take the time to be Mary for a while. I can tell you that if you are going to be prepared to be Martha whenever He might call you to be you will need to be Mary more than one hour a week on Sunday. The rest of the time the world and the devil is working against you. He knows when He will place in your path a neighbor who is in need, quite

possibly a neighbor that you have once called your enemy. When you make time to sit at His feet, He will prepare you for the work He wants you to do.

You won't get the balance between Mary and Martha right. But that's OK. Your eternity doesn't rest on it. It rests on Jesus who shows us with His life and His word how to be both Mary and Martha. May you be empowered to go forth from here in the confidence and hope that He goes with you, His loving arms enfold you, directing you to be Mary when the time is right as well as Martha when the time is right. May His Spirit protect you, keeping alive your certain hope and faith in life everlasting. Amen.