

Proper 11C (Pentecost 8), 2010

Text: Luke 10:38-42

Title: Mary and Martha

+ INI +

I must confess that I am a Martha. I would much rather be doing something, to be busy and active, than just sitting and listening. In school, I always had to be taking notes (or doodling) to keep my concentration. I'd rather be doing than just listening.

I'm not just speaking in general here, but in terms of my spiritual life as well. As a pastor, it's easier for me to go out and visit with other people, to spend time doing things around the church, than to spend time with my own devotions and prayer life, and just sit and listen to Jesus. It's easier for me to be doing something else, than reading and meditating on God's Word.

I suspect that many of you are like me. You're happy to keep busy, to work and volunteer, to go and do things for God rather than just to sit and listen to Jesus. We can talk to Jesus and spend time in prayer, but to listen to Jesus is much harder.

Unfortunately, church work can actually get in the way of Jesus. We get so busy serving and working and volunteering, that we lose sight of what's really important, and that's listening to Jesus. We think that because we're at church so much, and that we're doing the Lord's work, that that is the most important thing, and everything is fine.

In a congregation like ours, this is a very real danger for all of us. We can get so caught up in what we're doing, that we lose sight of why we're here in the first place. You are here to listen. Not to listen to me, but to listen to the voice of Jesus Christ Himself.

If anything gets in the way, if there's anything that you make more important than listening to Jesus, especially on Sunday mornings, it has to go. Nothing should get in the way of listening to Jesus. If serving as usher or elder keeps you from listening to Jesus, then it needs to stop. If helping with the music or the altar guild or the refreshments on Sunday morning gets in the way of listening to Jesus, it has to stop. If counting the offering or visiting with other members after the service gets in the way of listening to Jesus, it has to stop.

If being a pastor were to get in the way of my listening to Jesus, I would have to quit. It's that simple. Listening to Jesus comes first. All these other things come somewhere else, further down on the list.

All of these are good and helpful things. But they are not the most important thing. Jesus tells us today the most important thing about being a disciple- and that is listening to Jesus.

A disciple is a learner. None of us ever move beyond being a disciple. No matter how old you are or how long you've been attending church, there is always something more to learn from Jesus.

Mary understood this, and so she was there at Jesus' feet, listening. Martha, on the other hand, was in the kitchen, working on the meal.

Now we shouldn't be too hard on Martha. Martha is not a pagan. She's not an unbeliever. Martha has a strong faith. Martha is the one who invited Jesus into her home.

When her brother Lazarus dies, Martha will give one of the most powerful statements of faith in the whole Bible. She says that she knows that her brother will rise again on the last day. Martha says this before Jesus has died and rose again. This is how strong her faith is. Even before Jesus has conquered death, she knows that it will happen.

So Martha is not an unbeliever. Martha trusts in Jesus. But she's letting her service get in the way of following Him.

Now there's a danger with our gospel lesson this week. It's the same as the danger with our gospel lesson last week.

Last week we were tempted to make the parable of the Good Samaritan into pure law- be a Good Samaritan, help and love other people, or else, to make it all about us and our ability to love one another. Instead, it's about Jesus, who comes and rescues us, who loves and cares for us.

This week we're tempted to do the same thing, to make this into a law story. "Now be a Mary and not a Martha. Don't be busy and worried, but sit and listen to Jesus."

Now that's true, and we need to hear that sometimes. We need to hear the law, when we're tempted to pass by those in need, or when we get too busy to listen to Jesus. We need to be called to repentance at those times. But there's more to this story. There is gospel here.

This story is not just about Mary and Martha. There's someone else here. Jesus is in the story, too! This story is also about Jesus.

Notice how Jesus gets involved in the story. Martha comes to Jesus with a question. It's more of a demand, but it's still phrased as a question. "Jesus, don't you care?" Jesus don't you care about me? Don't you care that I've been left to do all the work?

That's a question we've all asked at various times, especially when we get busy serving at church. Jesus, don't you care that I've been left to do all the work? Jesus don't you care that I've been on this board for years? That no one else shows up to help? That everyone else in this church is so lazy? Jesus don't you care?

The truth is, yes, Jesus cares. Jesus cares more than you will ever know. But He cares in a different way. Many times Jesus doesn't care for you in the way that you want, Jesus cares for you in the way that you need. Jesus cares in a way that we don't expect.

Jesus doesn't care for you by sending you servants to help you with your work. Jesus cares for you through His words. Jesus cares for you by teaching you, by forgiving you, by encouraging you, by granting speaking words of grace and peace.

Jesus cares for you by saying, "Stop, sit a spell, and just listen. Let go of your cares and your worries. Don't be anxious and upset. I'll take care of all these things. Just sit and listen."

Here's the gospel. Jesus cares about you.

Jesus tells Martha that her sister has chosen the better part. This word for "part" or "portion" is often used to refer to meals. It's a play on words. Instead of preparing a dish for Jesus, Mary has chosen the better dish, the food that Jesus has brought in His teaching, His words.

Martha has invited Jesus into her home. But Jesus is the true host. He is the one to provide a meal that will not just satisfy the body, but the soul.

When we come to this place, we are not the hosts. Jesus himself is the host. We are His guests. He comes to serve us.

Jesus comes to serve Marys and Marthas alike.

This morning we bid farewell to Mrs. Grace Scott. She has been busy and active in countless ways in this congregation for nearly 60 years. We give thanks to God for this service and all the work that she has done to support the work of this congregation. But what is most important has been the times that Grace has done nothing, and just listened to Jesus' words and received His body and blood. That is the best part, and we would all do well to follow the example of Mary, of Grace, and so many other folks that you know who have been faithful in listening to Jesus- here in the Divine Service, in Bible Class, and in daily devotions.

These are times when Jesus serves us, when Jesus feeds us. And that truly is the best part. This story ends with another cliffhanger. We don't know how the story ends. We don't know if Mary sets down her pots and pans, takes off her apron and sits down at the feet of Jesus, or if she heads back to the kitchen to do just one more thing, and gets caught up in her work again.

That the point of the story, and the reason why Luke includes it here. The question comes back to you. Will you choose the better portion, too? Will you join Mary at the feet of Jesus? Or will you ignore Jesus and head back to your busy service? What's more important to you- being served by Jesus or serving Him yourself? Jesus tells you what's best. Listen to Him.