

“Marys” and “Marthas” - Luke 10:38-42

Our text for meditation for this morning is from the Gospel of Luke 10:38-42, which I read before. The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day. Amen

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The Gospel of today mentions two women who do different things when Jesus comes to their home. Martha was busy serving. No doubt there was much to do when Jesus dropped by on His way to Jerusalem. Mary, on the other hand, was busy learning from Jesus instead of helping Martha. Martha saw this as laziness on Mary's part. She asked Jesus to rectify the situation. She expected Jesus to send Mary on her way, and help her.

The surprise is that Jesus commended Mary and scolded Martha. He tells her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." These two women represent us in one way or another or perhaps we have a little bit of Mary and Martha.

I remember a man in one congregation who took personal responsibility for the condition of the furnace in the church. He checked it several times each week during winter season. The furnace was his special project and he cared for it very well, and reported on its condition regularly. He talked often to other church leaders about the importance of keeping it in top shape, worrying about the cost of fuel and the ability of the congregation to pay for it. He was a “Martha”; a practical, sensible servant of the church who valued the daily operation of the furnace and, consequently, the daily operation of church offices and programs above all else.

We all know that we have these “Marthas” in the church. They are hard workers in the church but they seldom assist to bible studies. Some of these “Marthas” are careful caretakers of church buildings and other office duties in the church. Countless are the prayers of gratitude and thanksgiving we sent toward these loyal members; these soldiers of the kingdom of God who work so tirelessly at keeping the Church of Christ afloat from day to day, from season to season, and from occasion to occasion. Their accomplishments are visible though not always acknowledged.

Perhaps you identify with Martha, too, or even with all the “Marthas” of the church of today, and in our identification we may occasionally wish that all children of God were Marthas, especially as we cast a judgmental and sisterly eye toward the Marys in our lives.

What about the Marys of the church? The Marys are the women and men with whom Marthas somewhat share partnership in the Gospel, membership in the Church of Christ. The Marys

are those who are less concerned with the financial cost— gain or loss of a ministry than with the call to be the body of Christ to the larger community.

I am thinking of the men and women of the Church of Christ who had developed a sense of what is most important in life. They are the ones you could depend on to have read the texts prior to Sunday worship. They are the ones who sought out new faces at services to welcome them to her church home, to put them at ease with her relaxed and warm greetings.

Even more important, they notice who is not there—at worship, at Bible study, or other gatherings—and found time to call or drop a card to or stop by to see a number of them, to show their concern, to listen to theirs, to be with them in whatever the circumstance. They are the Marys, with their priorities in order as a Christian. They are the ones who brings the presence of Christ to others through their natural and genuine style. Marys are like that, the faithful few who turn out for every Bible study, every devotion, every opportunity to learn and to share their faith. They are there when times are hard; they are beside us in hospitals and homes, at funerals and at divorces, in times of quiet loneliness and times of inner struggle.

Countless are the prayers of thanksgiving and gratitude we have sent toward these perceptive and loving Marys. Countless, too, are the times one of us may have said to one of these Marys in our lives: “You do not have to stay. Go home. You must have other things to do.” Only to hear with great relief the response: “You are more important than anything else right now. I am staying.”

The Mary and Martha we meet in the Gospel of Luke as they interact with Jesus are not strangers to us - they are of us and we of them. Perhaps more keenly than with any other character we meet in all the Gospels, we identify most strongly with these two sisters in faith. They dramatize the question that comes to every Christian life. A question of priorities, a struggle with which responsibility takes precedence when we walk with our Lord to Jerusalem and the cross.

The context of the story of Luke about Mary and Martha and their encounter with Jesus must keep its central place in our study of them, and more important, in our identification with them. Apart from the lessons to be learned from the scenario in their Bethany home as Mary and Martha welcome Jesus and His disciples and act out the differing styles, we must be clear about the circumstances surrounding the visit of Jesus with them.

This visit is a casual dropping over to share food and talk of the joys and troubles of the ministry. Rather, there is an urgency to this visit as though it were planned as one of the essential

stops on a long trip—an experience that builds toward some other destination, a respite en route to a greater goal. Jesus, on His way to Jerusalem, stops at Bethany at the home of Mary and Martha as a natural, logical resting place. Jesus visits His faithful and devoted followers, sharing His message of new life with them again . . . for the last time.

Jesus, on His way to Jerusalem and the cross, does not have time for daily practicalities such as who is helping prepare food and who is not. His time is better spent talking, telling the miraculous story of God's redeeming love for His people as it is being shown in His very life and impending death. This visit carries that sense of urgency and purpose that characterizes all of His encounters in these closing days. It is the kingdom of God that matter; the message of forgiveness and hope and of new life which He preaches and which His believers hear with a new significance as they walk with Him to Jerusalem.

If we are to hear that message today with new significance, if we are to open ourselves again to Jesus' powerful words of forgiveness and hope, if we are to be the redeemed people God calls us to be through Jesus Christ. If we are to live as Christian people of the cross—then we hear the story of Luke about Mary and Martha in its urgent, pressing-toward-the- kingdom context as response to our daily struggle with priorities in Christian life and as response to that question of balancing our Marys and Marthas as we walk with our Lord to Jerusalem.

Luke writes that Mary somehow knew that context; her priorities were in order as she listened to and learned from Her Lord. She clearly saw the opportunity for a cherished visit with Jesus and took it, made the most of the little time she had with Him, even enjoyed it. For Mary every other priority fell by the wayside while she heard Jesus speaks making Him her sole priority.

The story of Luke about Mary and Martha and their priorities in serving and being served by Jesus their Lord provides us with an analogy for our own lives. We may identify with Mary or with Martha, perhaps a bit of each. It is a matter of context that is most important, however, in their lives and in our own. You and I surely do not want to be checking the furnace when our Lord comes to visit and speak His Word, when the kingdom is at hand, anymore than Martha wanted to be out in the kitchen when Mary sat with Jesus.

We do want the Mary in us to dominate; to be first, and the Martha to be second. We do want those instincts and perceptions of what ought to be important, of what is high priority to take precedence in our lives of faith and servitude that others may know of the kingdom of our Lord through the witness we offer. The obvious application of the words of Jesus is that listening the word of Jesus is more important than feeding Jesus. God delivers His blessings through His Word.

When Jesus says to Martha that “only one thing is necessary”. He is saying that listening His word is the most important thing in our life, because it is through His Word that God delivers His blessings to us. God delivers Himself through His Word.

When I or anyone else encourages you to attend church or attend a Bible study, we are only encouraging you to receive more of God’s blessings, more of God’s power, more of God’s forgiveness, more of God’s salvation. We are encouraging you to get more of the God who took on human flesh and sacrificed Himself for your eternal life. And God’s Word has only benefits for those who are in Christ Jesus. So listening to Jesus is more important than anything else we do. Listening to Jesus is the most important thing we can do because His words give us salvation.

We do want to be aware of our context, clearly focused on that vision of the kingdom He promised coming even now. We do want to be capable of following the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we, like Mary, seize the moments of learning, of growing spiritually, of sharing, of befriending. And in so doing that we demonstrate Christ to the world and hear Him say of us: “You have chosen the right thing, and it will not be taken away from you.” Amen

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord,
and Savior. Amen.