

Luke 10:38-42

As Jesus and his disciples went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. 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." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

First of all, I want to recognize an effort. It is always a joy for me when a congregation steps up and pulls together to be God's church. There is no question that that is what happened at Redeemer in response to Win Moore's passing, whose funeral we had yesterday. Pastoral care, fellowship, meals ministry, Sue in the office, Flower Guild, our Funeral Coordinator, and in particular our resident Deacon, Lee Quinn, who stepped in for me and met with the family and designed the service. It is a congregation doing what a congregation is supposed to do.

There's a story that you have probably heard before. It goes way back. It goes like this. One Sunday morning a Rector was giving a children's sermon. The kids came up the aisle just like they do here and sat on the steps in front of the altar. The priest had decided to use an particular example, something all the children would connect with, to make his point. He wanting to get them involved, so he started with a question. He asked them, "What lives in their back yards, has a bushy tail and likes to eat nuts." They all just stared back in silence. He elaborated. "You know...What is it that lives in your back yards, likes to eat nuts, has a bushy tail, and likes to jump from limb to limb in the tress?"

The kids looked at each other hesitantly, and finally one of them raised his hand. The priest said, "Yes, can you tell me what it is?"

The boy said, "Well, I'm sure the answer must be Jesus, but it sounds like a squirrel to me."

You know, I could just kiss that kid. Whether he knew it or not, he had the "one thing" that Jesus was talking about in our passage today. "I'm sure the answer must be Jesus..."

We live in a world of so many Marthas and not enough Marys. So many agendas. So many false priorities. For Martha it was all about her work. Now don't get me wrong, what Martha was doing wasn't bad, but you heard how Jesus responded when she came to him and pleaded with him to make Mary fall into line and get into the kitchen to help. Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, (you can hear the sadness) you are so distracted and worried by so many things, when there is only one thing, [only one primary thing,] and Mary is the one who chose it."

So often we get trapped in the idea that is so often portrayed that Jesus is just encouraging Martha to slow down and smell the roses. You know...it's one of those don't worry, be happy moments. But that can't be it. If it was, this passage would be about Martha. At its core, this passage is not about Martha. It is not even about Mary. It is about the choice we have to make between the expectations of the world and the desires of Christ. It is not about our work. It is about the work Christ did, and does, on our behalf.

There are so many Marthas in our world and so few Marys. So many personal and group agendas. So many false priorities. The world is driven by them.

I looked back at the last time I preached on this passage. It was three years ago, this week. Back then it was about Trevon Martin and George Zimmerman and how the forces-to-be were using the stupid and unfortunate actions of a couple of individuals and stoking racial hatred in order to divide one segment of God's children from another segment of God's children. They were dividing a society to serve an agenda instead of seeking to find a way to solve a problem and uplift a people. That was then. This time it could be about Nice, or Paris, or Orlando, or Istanbul. It might be about Black Lives Matter, or the politics of division, or the economics of greed, or the resentment of envy, or the pursuit of power. We see it all the time. It seems to have fully taken over our world.

And those are just some of the obviously bad ones. Those are the ones that depend upon killing and lies and division. But let's not kid ourselves. There are other not so obvious ones, and, for me, I would rather have a clear cut evil over a masquerading good. C.S. Lewis spoke about how the best of angels become, when fallen, the worst of demons. The example he used was motherhood. In and of itself, motherhood is a wonderful blessing, but when we make motherhood inward serving instead of outward focused it becomes stifling. It can even become damaging.

It was the same with Martha. You see, Martha wasn't doing anything wrong. Quite the contrary. She was serving. She was engaging in fellowship. You could make the argument that she was exercising her God given gifts. But in the end she was being robbed of her joy by being ticked off at, and divided from, her sister, Mary. "Lord, tell that lazy sister of mine to get off her kiester and get to work!"

The problem was that Martha had interjected her agenda for Jesus' mission. I know it seems minor, but she had put her work above God's plan of love and reconciliation for all people. Intended or not, her message was, "Never mind what Jesus has to say for our lives, get to work."

I hate to say it, but I think we get this a lot in the world. And I hate to say it even more, we get it a lot in the church. "Never mind what Jesus has to say for our lives, get to work." We put our things above God's things. And when we do, fellowship becomes about the food, properly prepared and displayed, instead of gathering a community. Stewardship becomes about paying bills instead of being a transformational act of gratitude. Worship becomes a duty, maybe even a task, instead of being an experience of communion with God. The truth is that we have too many Marthas and not enough Marys.

Can you take just a second and imagine what our world today would look like if we all would just focus on the "one thing" that Jesus is talking about? Can you imagine the changes we would see, if we would all sit at Jesus' feet and learn the truth about love and peace and community that he was calling us to? Can you imagine what our world would be like if we would all focus on the "one thing" and sit at Jesus' feet and learn to see each other as Christ sees us? Can you imagine what it would be like if we all would live that message and share the message of that "one thing" with all people? In that world nightclubs wouldn't be shot up, trucks wouldn't be plowing into crowds, and airports wouldn't be bombed. Politics wouldn't require lies, economics would be about opportunity instead of being opportunistic, and power would come through humility.

What is so important about our passage this morning is that Jesus offered Martha, and he offers us, a choice. But it is not an either or choice. It is rather a choice of priority. He is not telling Martha that she shouldn't serve. What he is telling her is that in order to serve authentically and even joyfully, you must do so by traveling the path that Mary chose. Economics, politics, power, relationships between people can only come through first getting the "one thing", the first thing, right.

Paul had it right in his letter to the Colossians:

"Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him-- provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.”

Learning to become a servant of the Gospel at the feet of Christ...That is how we get to the world that, at this point, only seems to exist within our imaginations.

Amen