

"Be More Like Martha"
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Luke 10:38-42
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Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him.³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's⁴⁰ 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.⁴² Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word.

The inclination in examining this passage in our New Testament lesson has been to focus on how Martha got everything wrong and how her sister Mary got it all right.

Martha was working away making sure the house was in good shape, probably making a meal, distracted, going in all different directions, while Mary was at the Lord's feet, listening to what he was teaching. Jesus himself told Martha she was missing the boat. That she needed to not worry about hosting and to take a step back and take in quiet times of learning and exploring spiritual matters. That has been a common way to interpret this text, and certainly a valid one.

But I invite us all to think of another time when Jesus is visiting their home in Bethany, where Martha is working away, getting things done. Clay pots are clacking together and being set on the table. Martha is placing some wood on a fire where the food is being cooked and the bread is being baked. And there in the front room is Mary, sitting by the Lord. He is explaining the scriptures to her. And then after a few minutes, Mary says, *"Lord please tell Martha to stop making so much noise from the other room. She's distracting me. Shouldn't she be in here listening to you?"*

"Mary, Mary," Jesus replies. "You are distracted all the time by spiritual things. Your sister is doing all the work in the house, and here you are, not helping her. Martha has chosen the right thing today because she knows how important it is to help others and do the work that is necessary for hospitality. Help her. Be more like Martha today."

Both women in both stories have wonderful characteristics of what it means to be a good, active Christian. Mary is a student, devouring the words of Jesus. To be well-rounded Christians, we need to be active students of the Word and the lessons of Jesus. We also need to be like Martha, to be of service to others. To help others where we can. I think we all – including myself – need to be more like Martha.

Now, as I look out on our congregation in the sanctuary today, I see a lot of Marthas, and I am grateful for that. We need a lot of Marthas, and Martys, if you will, I don't want the men to feel left out, to make the church run.

It takes deacons and elders, it takes members and non-members to make the church go. The work that is done is not glamorous. It is hosting coffee hour. It's the deacons and their unsung work of making sure coffee hour is in place with water, lemonade, coffee, and snacks, ready to go. It's folks taking communion to people who can't come to church anymore. It's folding the bulletins and changing the banners in the sanctuary. It's being a greeter. It's being a communion server. It's being elder of the day, making sure the church is open and the lights are turned on and off after the events of the day are over. It is singing in the choir. It is giving out donuts at LifeCare Center once a month. And this list is just scratching the surface.

Being a member of the church – to being a disciple of Christ -- isn't just about a financial commitment. Some of us can give, and some of us are not able to give much money, and that is OK. I think sometimes we don't talk enough about the time and talent part of our stewardship giving to the church. In a lot of organizations that rely on volunteers to get things done, most of the work is done by about 10% to 20% of the people in the organization.

And I'd say we are around 20% here. Thank God for those 20%. We also have a fair amount of people who are not able to do some of this work because they physically can't do the things they used to. Others have other limitations and issues that make volunteering impossible.

I want to thank everyone for all their work. And I want to encourage everyone to keep doing what they are doing. And if you can, maybe if you can do just a little bit more. And for those who are able, but who have stepped to the sidelines and are able to serve, maybe think about getting back in the game. Maybe it's time to be more like Martha again. For those who are a little shy, it's not about you. It's about getting the work of the Lord done.

I know some of you give a lot. I know people burn out. I don't want anyone to burn out. I'm not asking folks to be here at the church working all the time.

I realize summer is a difficult time to do the work of the church. We have people who travel a lot, and others who go away entirely for the summer. We have a smaller pool of helpers to draw from.

That 20% I was talking about? I think we can get that to 35%, don't you? I don't think I'm asking that much. There is a lot more we could do with just 15% of people being more active in the congregation being of service.

Our deacons and our elders on session do a lot. They are doing the same amount of work with fewer people than they had a few years ago when the number of deacons and elders on session went from 12 to 9. I'd love to see us get back to 12 deacons and 12 elders on session. Are you a deacon in waiting? Are you an elder in waiting to be on session and help guide this church? Your church? The church, the body of Christ?

There is a time to be like Mary in our lesson today. And there's a time to be more like Martha. The Lord has work for us to do. There is work to be done. I'd love for us to do more here, in the church and out in the community.

The Lord needs your time and talent.

If you're feeling a tug at your heart as I speak these words, it may be the Lord calling to you to be more like Martha.

Let us all ask ourselves today, and every day, how we can all be more like Martha, for the glory of God, our Lord Jesus the Christ. Amen.

I will close with a prayer written by Philip Melanchthon, a famous figure of the Reformation, who lived from 1497-1560.

Merciful God, through the mouth of your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, you said to us, "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." We respond to your divine command, O Lord, and sincerely beseech you to richly bestow the Holy Spirit on these your servants, and on all of us who are called to your ministry that we, with a great multitude, may be your evangelists, true and steadfast against evil, so may your name be hallowed, your kingdom come, and your will be done. Hear this our prayer, through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns throughout eternity.

Amen.