

“A Visit with Mary & Martha”

Pastor Rich Knight

Trinitarian Congregational Church

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Luke 10:38-42

One of the beautiful characteristics of many stories in the Bible is that they very quickly and succinctly paint a portrait of the characters involved. This is one of the finest examples of that. The account is only 5 verses long, but it gives us a very clear picture of the character & temperament of everyone in the story. Let's take a look.

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he 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."

If ever there was a story for our time this is it! Martha was distracted by many things. We live in an age of distraction. The age of interruption. Distracted is the new normal. Busy is our new mantra.

How's it going? "Busy."

How ya doin'? "Busy."

What's new? "Busy."

And we are - busy and distracted.

We live in the age of Martha - Martha on steroids. That's not a pretty picture. Skip that. How about, Martha after too many Cappuccino Latte Mocha Verde's!

Our lives are too caffeinated. And our To-Do Lists are endless - It's like a computer virus that keeps repeating.

- Pay the bills, get the oil changed in your car, get it ready for winter, keep your calendar up to date, make that dentist appointment, remember birthdays, call your extended family, clean your closets, exercise more. Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha!

And not only are our minds cluttered with demands, “should’s” and our to-do lists, our homes are cluttered as well. I heard this week that there are more storage facilities in the U.S. than there are McDonalds. Every community in the country has at least storage facility. We have too much stuff! Most of us have too much stuff surrounding us and more coming in and at us every day. I can never keep up with my “In” box here at church or at home. I never see the bottom of it. And I never keep up with the magazines that I get. Don’t these people know that I didn’t finish reading the last one they sent me! - they just keep sending more! And the pile gets bigger and bigger and bigger. And it screams at me, “Martha, keep up!!!!”

I heard an interview this week with a guy who’s written a book on the psychology of our homes. And he said this: “Clutter takes peace out of a home. The more clutter, the less peace you have. Have you ever gone into a home without clutter? It’s pretty peaceful, isn’t it? - calm, soothing My wife actually does a really good job with this - it’s me who’s messing it up!

And then there’s digital clutter! Check your emails, check your texts, keep up with your Facebook messages, Twitter Tweets, Linked In, Instagram - You name it! I don’t have enough RAM!! - on my computer or in my brain! We’re overwhelmed with digital clutter! And if you’re like me, it’s even harder to keep up with Digital Clutter than it is with physical clutter. “Martha, Martha, Martha - what’s going on???”

All these advancements are progress I’m sure. But have they advanced our souls, Martha? And have they enhanced our relationships? Are we really more connected?

Excuse me – I just remembered something. I need to text someone. You don’t mind, do you?

HUD - how you doin’? LUMU - Love You, Miss You

BRB - Be right back NTIM - not that it matters

We’re more digitally connected, but are we really more connected?

I needed to have a very serious and difficult conversation with someone a couple of months ago. And in my mind I started writing the email message that I would send to this person. And then I said to myself - what the heck is wrong with me? Why would I even think of having this conversation digitally? Why would it even cross my mind? Have we forgotten how to live, Martha?

I was reading this clergy journal that I subscribe to. It was the Spring edition and I was reading it this week. And I saw this funny cartoon. In it, a guy comes into his pastor's office a little disgruntled. And he says to his pastor, "My 130 Facebook Friends agree with me that relationships in the church are largely superficial."

Maybe you're right, Martha. But maybe you're not.

Do you turn off your cell phones at dinner?

Mary would. Martha wouldn't.

If you're having lunch with a friend to catch up and your phone rings, do you answer it?

Martha would. Mary wouldn't.

I had a funeral recently and I was talking about how, "Your loved one will still be with you. You'll sense her presence, her guidance, her inspiration." And just then, somebody's cell phone went off. Scared me to death!

Mary always turns off her cell phone.

Martha never does.

Mary gives her full attention to who is right in front of her.

Martha struggles with getting distracted.

Mary understands connection.

She knows how to give someone her undivided and focused attention.

Martha's has almost forgotten.

Mary experiences emotional intimacy - in her friendships, in her relationships.

Martha struggles with it.

Now let's be fair to Martha. It was her house. She was responsible for dinner.

Luke 10:38 - *Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.*

It was Martha's house. It wasn't Mary & Martha's house. You often hear the story told that, "Jesus went to the home of Mary and Martha." But the text says it was Martha's home. She was responsible for the meal and the hospitality.

The commentaries say that this suggests that Martha was probably the older

sister of the two. If that's true, then these siblings have the same dynamic as the Prodigal Son & his Elder Brother.

The Elder Brother says, "Look at my awful younger brother. Do you know what he's done?"

Martha basically says, "Look at my irresponsible, immature, lazy sister. Tell her to help me. This meal is a lot of work!"

The responsibility for the entire evening rested squarely on Martha's strong shoulders. Of course, how fancy could the meals have been back then? I don't know. How much did Jesus require? I doubt he was a picky eater! But if Jesus were coming to my house, I'd be really stressed out too. Wouldn't you?

So we have a soft spot in our hearts for Martha. She's the overly responsible one, the one who always trying to do the right thing. But Jesus says Mary knows what it's all about. Mary instinctively knows not only what she needs but also what Jesus needs. Jesus is traveling from town to town. He's weary. He perhaps more emotionally exhausting than physically exhausted. What does he need most? - a meal or a friend? Martha's got the meal covered. Mary gives her focused attention and listened to her friend. Perhaps Martha could have done both? Or perhaps she could have realized that both were important? - food & friendship

"Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by so many things."

"Martha, remember, relationships are more important than recipes."

"And people are more important than perfection."

"And, 'Man does not live by bread alone.'"

"I'm not really here for the food, Martha. I'm here for the friendship."

"Never forget that the Kingdom of God is about people, Martha. It's about connectedness. It's about relationships. The Kingdom of God is among you!"

That was the message for Martha, and all of us Martha's who have followed in her path. But Luke didn't record the passage just for Martha and those with her temperament. Luke recorded this story for the early Christian Church. The Gospel documents were written for the earliest Christians to shape their lives with this new religion, this new Good News. And Luke's got a lot to tell them, a lot to teach them.

Do you know what story preceded this passage? One of the important principles for Bible study is always look at what comes before a passage and what comes after it. So the story of Mary & Mary comes right after the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Think about what the Good Samaritan did. He stopped to care for the beaten man in the ditch, he cares for his wounds, he somehow transports him to a guest house, he pays for the lodging, for meals, and he remembers to say, "If it requires more, I'll be back to pay it. If the Good Samaritan had been a woman her name would have been Martha!

Martha is a Good Samaritan, too. She went about doing good - and she's at it again. She's providing food, lodging, hospitality and a respite for Jesus – and the house has got to look good and the meal's gotta be just right, and there's just so much to do. But Good Samaritans need to remember to slow down and connect with the Savior - to sit at his feet and listen to his words.

One of the commentaries I looked at said this: *"It's possible to lose one's soul in a program of highly useful activity."*

I remember overhearing a conversation a few years ago where a bunch of teenagers were talking about their teachers. (this was in a different community) They mentioned one who they didn't think was very nice. One teen summed it up this way: "His real problem is he doesn't like kids." The sad and tragic thing is, he went into the profession precisely because he loved kids, but it sounds like he just might have lost his soul along the way. The same thing can happen to Christians and churches.

I had a good friend in Pennsylvania who was Mennonite. He went to a very fine church. They had a mission budget of \$100,000, because Mennonites tithe. And the extra money they have, they spend it on missions. I expressed my amazement to my friend. He said, "Sometimes I think all our religion is tithing." And he described to me a joyless Church, people who were doing all the right things, but like Martha they were "distracted by their many tasks." They had lost the soulfulness of faith. They had lost their joy.

The goal of the Christian is to be soulful, Joy-filled, Spirit-filled, love-filled Good Samaritans!

In the Middle Ages they looked at this text and believed the message in it was that the Contemplative Life was superior to the Active life, that it was more spiritual to pray than to serve. Mary's quiet spirituality was superior to Martha's

service. But the real message of Jesus is that they go together. That's why the Parable of the Good Samaritan and story of Mary & Martha are back to back. Because the ebb and flow of the Christian Life is back and forth between Mary and Martha.

Mary's contemplation & Martha's service.

Mary's spirituality and Martha's activity.

Mary's quiet spirit and Martha's busy hands.

Mary's listening and Martha's loving deeds.

Mary's connectedness and Martha's care.

They go together.

Think about it.

Amen.



The main idea for this sermon came from the title of a book I saw in our church lending library – Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World by Joanna Weaver. It's been sitting on a shelf in the Davis Room for the last several years. I looked for it this week and it wasn't there! So, I've still not read it! The Martha in me was a little mad that the book wasn't there. But the Mary in me was grateful that I had to sit at the feet of Jesus this week and listen for what he might be saying to me and hopefully to you. – Rich