

**MARTHA AND MARY No. 2**  
**Sermon for 7-18**  
**Scripture: Gen 18: 1-8; Luke 10:38-42**

My, what a nice morning! Some say, "Let us rejoice in this day that the Lord has made." I like to add, "Let us get busy and work in it!" My name is Martha of Bethany.

Since I'm getting such an early start on the morning, I should be able to get a lot done today. Just look at the dust again? Where does it all come from? (Begin dusting around the room.) It looks like my sister Mary has left her Scriptures lying around the house again! I wish she'd learn to put them away. But then, at least she's reading them. I suppose I should read God's Word more often, too. But who has the time? I've got so much to do.

Now, let's see. Breakfast. Plans for the day. House cleaning. I've got a list of things to do today. Honestly, sometimes I think I need to make lists to keep my lists straight. I'm almost out of dates again. I'll have to get out and pick some before it gets too hot. Water... yes. The water jar is full. I did that last night when it was cool. What shall I fix for lunch? There's left-over lamb roast from yesterday. Maybe I could warm it up in the gravy and add some lentils to make a stew.

(Shouting) Mary! Lazarus! Aren't you up yet? Come on! It's already six o'clock! I have a lot of jobs lined up for you, so let's get going.

What did you say, Lazarus? You forgot to tell me that you saw Jesus out on the Jericho road yesterday? He's stopping by? What? When? Oh Lazarus, why didn't you tell me last night? You forgot! How could you! You I like to have things comfortable and pleasant for him. Poor man, he deserves a good meal and a decent bed once in a while. After all the traveling and preaching he does, sleeping on

the ground so much. He deserves a nice meal and I'm going to see that he has it.

Lazarus! Go out and get the fattest lamb from the pen in back and prepare it for the oven. We can't very well serve Jesus left-overs!

Mary, get some sticks for the oven and light a fire first so it will be ready for the lamb roast. And don't leave your coat on the chair. Hang it up. The house must be just so! I want it spick and span for Jesus.

I should have put on a nicer dress today. But I don't have time to change now! Mary, you are sure dolled up! I wish you'd spend as much time cleaning as you do making yourself look nice. Did you dust under the chair legs?

Oh dear! Who is Lazarus talking to on the road? Don't tell me Jesus is here already! He is here! Hurry out and wash his feet and anoint him, Mary. Bring him in and have him sit in my nicest chair. I'll run out and check on the lamb myself. You make Jesus feel at home.

I'll have to make a salad out of some garden herbs. I wonder if I have enough olive oil? What's Mary doing now? Just as I thought. There she is sitting at Jesus' feet –drinking in every word he says. It's just like Mary. She gives the Master her complete attention and forgets about everything else! Sometimes I wish I could be like that. But there's so much work to do!

Mary should be helping me I wonder why the Master doesn't tell her to at least help me with these last-minute preparations. It's nearly noon! I like to serve meals right on time.

**I'll never get this done all alone! "Jesus, Master, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits there while I do all the work? Make her come and help me! What? What did you say, Jesus? I shouldn't be so upset over minor details? What do you mean? I've fixed you a lovely meal, taken out the best dishes and silver. I'm doing it all for you, Jesus. For you because you are such a dear friend. I love to serve you. (Pause) But I don't understand. "Mary has chosen the one thing worthwhile and it won't be taken away from her?" What do you mean? (Pause) I see.**

**The woman who chooses the place at your feet has chosen the good part. I am showing you honor by serving you. But Mary is showing you honor and love by listening to your words. She is showing that she cares by worshipping. We all need food for our bodies, but even more we need food for our souls. I've never thought about it that way before! And you say that a day's work can be done better if moments are set aside for prayer and listening to your Word.**

**Jesus, please forgive me. Mary, will you forgive me, too? And Lord, from now on help me to show you that I love you by both sitting at your feet and serving you. END OF DIALOGUE**

**Last time I preached this sermon I focused on hospitality. The Bible has a theology of hospitality that is found in both of our scriptures today. Besides Martha and Mary we have Abraham and Sarah spending a hot afternoon in the oaks of Mamre when three strangers appear. Although as the reader we know they are God**

and two angels; however, Abraham and Sarah are not aware of this fact. Still they go all out in sharing their food and company. Hospitality is extremely important. However this time I have a different story.

The Gospel story today comes immediately following last weeks' Good Samaritan story. Those of you that were here know that Jesus emphasizes both hearing AND doing, not hearing OR doing. Some pastors are hesitant to preach this scripture. Think about it! Can you imagine what would happen when we get together if all our worker bees decided that they would take this story literally and sit down at the very moment we needed them to greet, or wash dishes, or put out the goodies for coffee hour. Does the Mary and Martha story mean that sitting and listening and praying and learning are more important than cooking the meal or laying out the welcome mat? No pastor in her right mind would suggest such a thing, and I don't believe it's what Jesus is saying, either.

Now in the Good Samaritan story, Jesus emphasizes doing, loving our neighbor and I believe that today's story is about loving God. Both Mary and Martha loved Jesus. Jesus says there are different ways of loving God. Our deeds are to be balanced and even nourished by times of doing absolutely nothing but sitting and being with God. Some of you may remember that my last two pastor's corners in the Newsletter have focused on being with God by remembering the Sabbath and taking time for a journey within, one of those places where God dwells. However, as our two big August events draw near, the fair and the chicken BBQ I sure hope the Martha side doesn't get hidden away.

This is a church of busy people, sometimes it seems that satisfaction comes only by accomplishing many things. Our minds are so often filled with distractions and lists, the same as our

Martha character. Henri Nouwen once wrote that our lives, while full, are often unfulfilled. "Our occupations and preoccupations," he said, "fill our external and internal lives to the brim. They prevent the Spirit of God from breathing freely in us and thus renewing our lives." <sup>1</sup>

Jesus is not favoring Mary over Martha, and he's not lifting up one way of living the Christian life over another. Rather, he's inviting us to get caught up in the joy of being in his presence such that we forget, if only for a little while, all the usual things that hold us back, all the usual worries and headaches and concerns, and simply be.<sup>2</sup> Rather than our usual dualistic thinking, the story of Mary and Martha points to the interplay of spirituality and service and contemplation and action.

I will close with a poem from the author of the Martha Dialogue:

### Worship and Service

I cannot choose: I should like so much  
To sit at Jesus' feet, to feel the touch  
Of his kind, gentle hand upon my head  
While drinking in the gracious words He said.  
And yet to serve Him! O divine employ,  
To minister and give the Master joy!  
To bathe in cool springs his wery feet  
And wait upon Him while He sat at meat.  
Worship or Service: Which? Yes, that is best  
To which He calls us; be it toil or rest  
To labor for Him in Life's busy stir;  
Or sit at His feet , a silent worshipper.

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<sup>1</sup> Referenced by Kate Huey in an online sermon.

<sup>2</sup> David Lose, online sermon

