

Sermon 102316 Mary and Martha
Scripture- Luke 10: 38-42
Sermon Title- Being Mary in a Martha World

The good Samaritan parable immediately precedes today's gospel story in Luke. In that parable, Jesus teaches us how to treat others. In today's story, it's more about how we are to be as people. Let's take a look.

Today's gospel story is a classic depiction of a clash in attitudes, or approaches in life. Mary and Martha could not be more different in their approach to what appears to be an unexpected visit from Jesus. Martha busies herself with preparing a meal for Jesus while Mary just sits herself at his feet. Martha gets annoyed with Mary because she'd like some help. Jesus gives Martha a gentle rebuke saying that Mary is doing the right thing.

Now, let me say that from what I can tell there are many, many more Marthas around than Marys. Churches couldn't exist without Marthas. Who will do the coffee hour? Martha. Who will do the cleaning up? Martha. Who will see that childcare is provided? Martha. Who will handle the flowers? Martha. Who will provide the spectacular potlucks here at Union Church? All the Marthas. By this definition, a Martha of this world is a bright-eyed, practical minded person who is intent upon doing the right and good thing at the right and good time and in the right and good way. This is someone who is concerned and informed. You know this includes you men. Yes, by this definition you

are Marthas, too. These might be risky words for me to say but I stand by them. You get to work on time, you work to the best of your abilities, you do the upkeep around the house, you vote, and you contribute here in so many ways. You may not be concerned with placing good meals on the tables of unexpected guests but you are distracted by the need to hold up your end in this life. You take pride in being earnest and hard working.

We are Americans. We are the most productive society on earth. If there is work to do, we get it done. Period. We are a society of doers, of Marthas. Hand in hand with our inherent busyness is our chronic fatigue. We work hard and then lecture each other on how hard we work and how tired we are. Our hard work and fatigue might be the most interesting thing about us.

I had the chance to get a lesson in the American pace of life a number of years ago while traveling in the Italian countryside. We stopped for lunch at what can best be described as a booth with a few stools and a picnic table next to it. There were two of us and we both ordered the same thing, a ham sandwich. Now, the ham called prosciutto ham, is dried so should be sliced very thin. Well, this little old man in the booth started slicing this ham so thin, so carefully, even lovingly...but painfully slow for American business people stopping for lunch. My impulse was to start yelling things like, "I'm hoping to have this sandwich today, buddy! Could you step it up a bit?"

Then, it hit me. I'm not at work. I'm not even in the United States. Maybe I should let this experience happen at the speed that it happens. Maybe I'm on vacation and should relax and take the world as it is. Well, about a half hour later I enjoyed the finest sandwich I've ever eaten. Maybe it was the ham and maybe it was how slowly I ate it. That little man in the booth taught me a lesson that day. But, of course, I wasn't back to work a week and I was back to express lunch gulped down like I was afraid someone would steal it.

My small moment of illumination in Italy gives me a window on the struggles of Martha. God had come to visit her and she wanted to run around doing stuff for him. Martha loved Jesus but could only love him on her terms. Isn't that what we do? We express our love by doing things for others. That is another struggle of us Marthas of the world; it is very difficult to be receivers. It is said that it is more blessed to give than receive but it is definitely more difficult to receive than to give. The Marthas of the world are doing the necessary things, so occupied in the giving we do not have time to realize how frequently we are in times of need. Now, it is important to remember that Jesus never says or implies, nor am I for that matter, that there is anything wrong with hard work or good hospitality. What he is teaching us is to reorder our priorities. When Jesus comes into our lives he reminds us that we need the grace and peace he has to offer. We need to be able to stop what we are doing and allow God into our lives.

This is a story about how we can love God. Remember, the Greatest Commandment: Love God with your whole heart, soul, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. Being Marthas is worthy work but it is exhausting. Let's try being Marys for a while and sit at God's feet and let God fill us with what we need the most...God's love and God's grace.

I have adopted a little practice that I'd like share with you. During my daily prayer time, after I have gone through my praise and thanksgiving part and my prayer list, I enter into a time of what I call, silent prayer. When we pray, we usually start thinking or speaking prayers to God. Hopefully you start with praise and thanksgiving and go to your prayer list, but that represents outgoing words to God. In my silent prayer time, I avoid speaking to God and try to create stillness in me so I might receive word from God on how I might conduct myself either in general or about a specific thing.

That has become one of my favorite parts of my prayer time and actually my whole day. I suggest that you try it. It is awkward in the beginning, but you'll get used to it and I'll bet you'll love it as much as I do. For the purposes of this sermon, let me just call it my Mary time.

You know that little exercise I do to start worship? You know, the deep breath, the relaxation, the centering exercise. That's what I'm up to. Let's let go for a while and let God in. From this story we learn

when Jesus comes into our lives things aren't what they used to be, and
neither should we. AMEN