



**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Last Sunday, we heard the story of the Good Samaritan — the one who showed mercy, the one Jesus held up as an example of loving one's neighbor. "Go and do likewise," Jesus told us.

And now today we hear of Mary and Martha. But this time, the message is not "go and do," but rather "sit and listen."

These two stories, placed side by side in Luke's Gospel, aren't just a coincidence — they are a divine balance. The Samaritan calls us to **active discipleship**, to roll up our sleeves and get involved. The story of Mary and Martha calls us to **contemplative discipleship**, to sit down, open our hearts, and listen deeply to the voice of Christ.

So, which is it? Do we "go and do"? Or do we "sit and listen"? The answer, of course, is **yes**.

Let's walk into that little house in Bethany. A woman named Martha opens her home to Jesus. She's not just welcoming a teacher — she's welcoming the Son of God. And let's be clear: Martha is doing a good thing. In her culture, hospitality wasn't just good manners; it was sacred. Providing for guests — especially travelers — was an expression of faithfulness, of righteousness. Martha is doing exactly what society, tradition, and probably her mother expected of her.

Meanwhile, Mary — her sister — is doing something radical. She isn't in the kitchen. She's not setting the table. She is sitting at the feet of Jesus — a position usually reserved for male disciples. She's chosen the better part, Jesus says. The "good portion." But what does that mean?

Is Jesus dismissing Martha's work?

No. He's not scolding her for making a meal. He's not saying hospitality is wrong. What he *is* saying is that she has become "worried and upset about many things." The work — good as it is — has distracted her from something better: *being in the presence of the Lord*.

Now, I have to tell you — I am a Martha. Some of you are too. Maybe most of us. We are doers. We keep the church kitchen running. We write the newsletters. We stack the chairs, mow the lawn, balance the budget, and bring the potluck casserole.

And praise God for that! The church needs its Marthas — just as much as it needs its Marys.

But hear me on this — in order to be a good Martha, you first need to be a Mary.

Let me say that again: **To be a good Martha, you must first be a Mary.**

We cannot pour ourselves out in service to others if we are not first filled with the love of Jesus. We cannot extend grace if we haven't first sat long enough to receive it. We cannot serve the meal unless we've first tasted what Jesus is serving us.

You see, there's a tension in this Gospel story — a tension between **doing** and **being**. Between **action** and **presence**. Between **service** and **discipleship**. But what Jesus is saying here is this: **Discipleship must come first.**

When Martha storms into the room, upset that Mary isn't helping, Jesus doesn't rebuke her harshly. He says, "Martha, Martha..." Repeating her name tenderly. It's not scolding. It's an invitation. He sees her. He loves her. But he's telling her: "You're missing it. I'm right here. And you're so busy trying to serve me that you're missing the chance to be with me."

Now friends, this hits close to home, doesn't it? We live in a world of constant motion. Our schedules are full. Our devices buzz. Our calendars scream. We are busy. Distracted. Tired.

Even in the church, we can get so caught up in the work of doing church that we forget to be the church. My favorite example is one of Martha Stewart. You all know who she is right? Yes, the diva of all things domestic in North American. At least she was until her fall from grace to prison in a financial debacle. Martha, aptly named was one who showed the epitome of hospitality. And because of that, she gave the American homemaker plenty of extra work to do. After all, why buy marshmallows at the store for your s'mores when you could take an hour or two to make them from scratch. Ah yes, the perfect home, the perfect table setting and the perfect meal. What more do we need to distract us from what is truly important.

Although, I used this analogy when I first sent a MP3 recording of my preaching to the call committee here, some 14 years ago. Remember anyone? I think we can identify with good old Martha. I for one, always enjoyed entertaining in our home. But what I learned over time was that I was missing so much by being stuck in the kitchen with the last details of the meal, that I missed the important stuff, the visiting, the relationship building. Sometimes I even missed the gift opening at a birthday party or two. And did I really need to try to be such a perfect hostess and do it all to be respected, loved. Nope! And Jesus calls us to slow down. To listen. To make space for his presence. Mary chooses what is better — not because service is bad, but because in that moment, *the better thing was simply to be with Jesus*. Let me share a short story. And my usual disclaimer, all my stories are true and some of them actually happened.

There was a woman in our St Olaf congregation years ago — she was the very image of a Martha. She baked every pie for every funeral. She led the altar guild, and I swear she knew how many coffee cups were missing at any given moment. She taught my children how to roll lefse, bake flatbread, fry fattiman and more for the Lutefisk dinner. She organized that Norwegian meal for hundreds, even flying in the lutefisk from Norway.

But then her husband died. And for a while, she stopped baking. She stopped running the church kitchen. And one Sunday, she just sat. She didn't volunteer. She didn't organize. She just sat in the pew and let the music, the scripture, the silence wash over her.

And after the service she hugged me and said, “Gwen, for the first time in a long time, I heard Jesus speak to me.” Friends, we all need that moment. We all need to pause. To sit. To listen.

So, what do we take from Mary and Martha? Not that one is better than the other — but that there is a time for both. In reflecting on time as is done in Ecclesiastes.

*There’s a time to prepare the meal...*

*And a time to sit at the table.*

*A time to serve...*

*And a time to be still.*

*A time to speak...*

*And a time to listen*

Jesus is not choosing between two sisters. He is inviting both into deeper discipleship.

So, as you move through your week, your work, your worship, ask yourself: Am I acting as a Mary or a Martha? Am I making room, taking time, to sit at Jesus’ feet? Am I letting the “many things” distract me from the “one thing” that truly matters?

Two weeks ago, I resigned as the President of the Lord’s Cupboard. It was a difficult thing to do, for me. I have always had more on my plate than I could handle. But somehow, I usually manage to get things accomplished. But at what cost? What did I have to put aside to make room for another? My decision was to step down from the pantry, where I had written grants, filed taxes, and performed administrative tasks for over a decade. God was calling me to put my time to use in a better way and to concentrate on helping this congregation in the transition period when I retire. More than ever, I also still feel the call to share the good news of the Gospel from the pulpit both here and at Calvary as they struggle to keep their ministry alive. And to do that effectively, I have to spend more time reading Scripture, in prayer, leading Bible studies, and encouraging others to do the same.

So, I do believe that if you want to be a good Martha — and God knows, the church needs Marthas — you need to be a Mary first. And what I mean by that is that we all need time to read Scripture, to pray and have a relationship with our Father in heaven and to worship Him with Thanksgiving for all He has done for us. We need to let his love flow through our veins. So, I urge you to take time to let Christ fill you. Let his Word shape you. Let his love steady you and give you strength to go out and do what needs to be done for the Kingdom. Our message at the beginning of worship that comes from Psalm 46:10, “Be still, and know that I am God!” is a perfect reminder of what we all need to do in our lives.

I believe that then when you do go to serve, welcome, and work, your heart will be centered not in the busyness, but on Christ. We all have heard that with Christ, all things are possible. Our service to God and to our neighbor will be what God wants and what our neighbor truly needs.

Because when we are still and imagine ourselves sitting at the feet of Jesus, we are not just learning, we are becoming His disciples. We are becoming the disciples Jesus is calling us to be. We are called to live life as a Mary in our Martha world. God be with you! AMEN

