

Luke 10:38-42

As a female considering this story about Jesus coming to the home of Mary and Martha, I am wondering how a man comprehends this story. It truly demonstrates that Jesus doesn't relegate women to the kitchen and chores but believes they should listen to what he has to say. This opens the pathway for women to study the scriptures but what does this passage mean to a man?

Perhaps, being taught to equate value with productivity, a man can identify with Martha as a person with a drive to get things done. Men are taught they need to be good providers, to be problem-solvers, to be the one who keeps things running smoothly. Yet many women today have the same mindset. There is a deep sense of pride when we accomplish tasks, when we see a tangible result from our efforts. Yet this focus can sometimes lead us to equate value with productivity which can bring a sense of frustration, and a sense of being overlooked, especially when what we are doing goes unrecognized. In today's reading from Luke Martha seems to feel that way.

Martha is trying to be the welcoming host. She is cooking, setting a table, getting a meal ready, and no one seems to care that she's doing it all by herself when there is another woman in the home. In today's world it wouldn't be unusual for a man to be helping in the kitchen, but in the time of Jesus that was not so. Martha would have thought nothing if it were her brother sitting with Jesus, but when Mary, another woman, sits with Jesus there's a problem. Mary sits there, oblivious to the work that her sister is doing to provide a welcoming meal to these hungry men.

When Martha complains to Jesus, he tells her Mary has chosen what is better. He doesn't say what Martha does is wrong, it's just that Mary's is better. If we look at this in today's scenario, we see that Mary has chosen to step away from the worldly pressures and demands, making room for something far better... connection and presence. She is demonstrating courage as she lets go of the expectations of what should be done, choosing to listen rather than to perform.

I think most of us have a hard time being a Mary in a Martha world. Most of us are action oriented, feeling as though if we aren't doing something we are wasting time. And we very well could be wasting time if we are strong and able to do chores but choose to sleep or play games most of the time. However, those who are action oriented have a difficult time settling down and spending time with God, yet this is something that matters. We need relationship and growth that can only come from quiet time with God.

Jesus' response to Martha, "You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is necessary," asks all of us to discern what is essential in the environment of obligation that surrounds us. It may mean that our worth is not solely found in achievement, but also in openness, humility, and willingness to receive.

There is also practical insight offered in this passage. Even in retirement we find it difficult to slow down. We still want to measure our self worth by our productivity. Yet the story encourages us to intentionally seek moments of pause: to listen, reflect, and be present to those whom we care about, and to nurture our own spirit. There are times when the most meaningful contributions are not achieved by being busy but by being present, available to wisdom, to love, to the sacred in everyday life.

The struggle is real. We see Martha busy with the chore of getting ready to feed Jesus and the disciples. These days we, especially the younger people, are struggling to make it through a single day. My brother sent me a YouTube video of the song "We

Pray" in which one of the lines is "and so we pray that we make it to the end of the day." It holds the tension between spending time doing what needs to be done and spending time with God.

It is important to see a balance. Work and worship teeter back and forth in our lives. When the busyness is dominant, then Jesus says, "there is need of only one thing...." Always in response to grace we seek ways of being intentional about our life with God. Prayer, times of solitude and meditation, and aligning our wills to God's will becomes the priority. This is best demonstrated by a song from one of my favorite musicals, *Godspell*. The lyrics to one of its songs, "Day By Day" are: "Day by day 3 things I pray. To see thee more clearly. To love thee more dearly. To follow thee more nearly. Day by day."

Then in the 60s a song took the lyrics from Ecclesiastes chapter 3, where we hear the rhythmic cadence of the wisdom writer who portrays time and timing. There is a time ... "for everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven ... a time to be born and a time to die ... a time to break down and a time to build up ... a time to cry and a time to laugh ... a time to keep silence and a time to speak ... there's a time for everything."

There is a time for every matter under heaven. There is a time to labor and a time to love. There is a time to work and a time to worship. There is a time to be Martha and a time to be Mary. It is all about timeliness and balance.

A perfect example of a Mary-Martha balance is in the ministry of the *Marymusicians* – spelled M a r y- musicians from Edison Lutheran Church of Bow, Washington. These *Marymusicians* are not Christmas carolers though they have that look about them. They are parishioners who, at sunset on Wednesday evenings in the summer, pile into cars to drive through the countryside sixty miles north of Seattle and make their way onto the porches of the ill and grieving to sing them to sleep. With a person playing the guitar, they sing songs like: "Seek Ye First The Kingdom Of God," "Dona Nobis Pacem," and "Day By Day" from *Godspell*. It's a very simple ministry, two to ten, singing to people on their porches or outside their bedroom windows.

Marymusic is the "sister" to *Marthameals*, the name coined when the woman who started this ministry was scheduling three groups to provide dinners for a cancer patient. On one food delivery, she says she realized, "The meal nourished the patient's family but the patient's need was food for the soul." So she gathered singers from church and told them not to bring food but music ... they sang to a woman after her husband died. And to a four-year-old on the heart transplant waiting list. A widower (who wasn't a member of this 400-member congregation) talked about the parishioners who sang for his wife who was then dying from cancer. She requested "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" and later said, "I just had a real sense of peace sitting there." (Julie Sevig, *The Lutheran magazine*, "Porch Lullabies," September 2003, p. 24).

Two sisters representing two aspects of the Christian life alert us to the task of balance as we remember "the one thing needful."

In the end, Luke 10:38-42 serves as both a challenge and an invitation. It challenges the thinking that constant action defines our value, and it invites us to discover a deeper strength: the strength to listen, to be present, and to embrace the "one thing" that truly matters—a relationship with the Divine that grounds and transforms all of life.

All glory be to God.