

Luke 10:38-42

Sunday, July 20, 2025 - Meditation

Here's a story we can all relate to. All we need to hear are the two words: worried, distracted. You can fill in the details.

We discover right away that Martha is a good person - a person of faith. She refers to Jesus as Lord and offers him her hospitality by welcoming him into her home. She goes about making preparations for a meal, and perhaps preparing for Jesus to remain a while. It was a big job, because Jesus was not alone. The text says, "As THEY went on their way." She had his disciples to tend to as well.

While Martha is about her chores, her sister Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet listening to what he's saying. Martha is doing what was expected of women in that culture. One person comments on our reading: "Rather than assuming the role expected of women in her culture, she [Mary]

takes her place at the feet of Jesus. She assumes the posture of a student learning at the feet of a rabbi, a role traditionally reserved for men.

One may have thought in that culture that Jesus would have told Mary to go and do the traditional work of a woman: to get busy waiting on the guests, not to sit and learn at the feet of the rabbi.”

The problem, though, isn't that Martha is busy serving but that she is “distracted by her many tasks.” That word “distracted” can also mean “pulled or dragged in different directions,” “over-occupied.” In other words, she's stressed out. And she lets it show by complaining: “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” You can hear the resentment, the self-pity, and the accusatory tone – “Don't you care that I'm working so hard without any help from her?” And she demands that Jesus tell Mary to give her a hand.

But Jesus, perhaps trying to calm her, replies, “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.”

What is the better part - the one thing - that Mary chooses to do? To sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to him. Is the lesson for us simply to spend time with Jesus in prayer and devotion rather than being consumed or distracted or stressed out by busyness? Yes, it may be a lesson about how we manage our time. But it's not the whole lesson. Martha's fault was not being busy preparing a meal and her home for guests. She was, by nature, a good host, and service was in her makeup. But she allowed those things to take her away from the presence of Christ in her life. One person writes about this: “Martha's distraction and worry leave no room for the most important aspect of hospitality — gracious attention to the guest.”

Wherever and however we serve or work or play, the gospel story would not have us forget that only one thing is needed: to be in the presence of Christ, yes, even while we are doing those things.

Are we worried, distracted, overwhelmed, resentful? “You are worried and distracted by many things.” Not just when we’re busy but perhaps when we’re not. Sometimes our brains continue to work overtime even when we have stopped working. We spend our days and nights worried and distracted, pulled this way and that. Why are we no longer at the feet of Jesus? Because we have replaced him with ourselves. We have assumed it’s all up to us. We are afraid to trust him. Or we say, “Don’t you care that I’m doing this all by myself?” We no longer depend on him, no longer believe that he is sovereign - that it ultimately all rests with him, not us. We have lost our place at his feet.

This, I think, is what I hear from the gospel of Luke. Jesus is admonishing Martha, using Mary as an example, to put

him at the center of her busyness - not necessarily to put down her work, but to not let it come between her and himself. Elsewhere in Luke, Jesus says, “Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?”

Deacon Pat reminds me of this in the daily devotions she sends by email: “This goal of being a model of good works in every respect makes us realize how much we need our Lord each moment. And as we grow in a life of doing what is right and true and good, it helps us grow in humility as well, remembering that our Lord is the source of our strength.”

With this lesson from Luke’s gospel in mind, let me conclude with one more quote from Deacon Pat: “What a wonder that we are called to walk in Jesus’ footsteps, knowing that it is only possible to do it through the Spirit that works in and through us.”