

## Luke 10:38-42

There were two brothers who lived in Nebraska. They were alike in many ways. Both were farmers. Both were respected members in the same congregation. They were both active in their church and in their community. One way in which they were different was this... Although they were both regular in church attendance, one of them was always absent from the pew when it was time to plant in the Spring and harvest in the Fall. The other brother, although he farmed as many acres, never missed a worship service in the Spring or in the Fall. We spoke one time about this. And I saw the pain in his face as he explained to me why he was so faithful. He wasn't always this way, he told me. But then his little girl became sick and died. And with tears in his eyes, he shared with me that there was no way on earth that anything was going to come between him and his Lord, because one thing he knew - he was determined to be with his little girl again in heaven.

This brother reminded me of Mary who sat at the feet of her Lord listening to His words. And it's true that the other brother reminded me of Martha. He was a Christian man no doubt. But his attitude was different. When it was time to work, he worked. Nothing was going to come between him putting food on the table for his family.

I never did condemn this brother for his attitude, just as Jesus did not condemn Martha. There were many times when Martha sat at Jesus' feet. Of this we can be certain. But when it was time to work, God-pleasing work, serving a meal for Jesus, this became her focus. Not just here in Luke 10 do we see this. In John 12, after their brother Lazarus was raised to life, we see these same sisters. And Martha again is serving, and Mary again is at Jesus' feet.

What both Mary and Martha do flow from faith. The one desires to hear Jesus' words; the other desires to serve His needs. So what's the problem? Why is this story even in the Bible? Well it wouldn't be here except for Martha. Mary does not complain to Jesus about her. Martha complains to Jesus about Mary. Jesus is letting well enough alone. He is teaching Mary, and later He will eat the meal prepared by Martha. We don't hear Jesus yelling out, "Martha, get out of that kitchen and park it here next to your sister!" He is not going to correct her even though she does have her priorities out of order. "*Man does not live by bread alone!*" He could have called out into the kitchen, "*but by every word that comes from the mouth of God!*" He spoke these words to the devil, but He does not speak them to Martha. "*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve!*" He could have yelled. He spoke these words to His disciples, but He does not speak them to Martha.

Instead He lets Mary be her example. There is no higher form of worship than to sit at the feet of Jesus. In fact we can rightly say that this, and this alone, is worship. The Divine Service is not what we do for Jesus; it is His service to us. Worship is receiving the Word of the Lord in a heart of faith. Mary, therefore, was worshipping while Martha was in the church basement preparing the dinner.

So where do we fit in? Some of us are more like Mary, and others of us more like Martha. But I'm not up here to condemn the Martha's in our midst. Instead I thank you for your service. But even as I say this, I hold up the Mary's in our midst as an example for all of us.

Our greatest need...and we can even say that the one thing needful, for Jesus says it...is to sit at His feet and listen attentively to His words. Why is it, do you suppose, that Mary had this attitude and Martha had a different attitude? Mary grabbed hold of the words of her Lord and Martha grabbed the pots and pans. Why?

We have to look at things in a backwards way here. Mary did not grab hold of the words of Jesus. His words grabbed hold of her. And Martha was grabbed by all the work that needed to be done.

Our text from last Sunday sheds much light on the text for today. In the verses just prior to the Mary and Martha narrative, we hear the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is natural for us to believe that we are the Good Samaritan, and that not only others, but also Jesus is represented by the man in the road who is very much in need. And so Martha desires to serve as the Good Samaritan. She has the food and the means to care for Jesus.

Yet Mary has a different attitude. She is not the Good Samaritan. Jesus is. And she has the posture of sitting, yes lying there in the road at Jesus' feet, for He has the true food which she needs. And so she hangs on every word that comes from His mouth.

But this posture, this attitude is a gift. When the words of Jesus grab hold of you, you see everything in a different way. It's like the blind man receiving sight from Jesus. It's a gift of the Lord to see His words as the one, yes the one thing we need in this life. "*Seek first His kingdom in this way,*" He promises, "and all your other needs will be taken care of."

God gave this gift to the one brother in Nebraska. Although his little girl had died years earlier, the tears never left him. "Why did God take her from me?" This painful question was always on his mind. And the answer was always given, "God wanted her in heaven with Him." I agreed with this, but perhaps it's also true, I suggested, that God wants you in heaven. And so through this painful loss, God gave to this man the posture of Mary as a gift. For those who humbly sit at the feet of Jesus in this life will be kissing those same feet with tears of gratitude in the life to come.

It's because those very feet, along with His hands, were pierced with nails. This was Jesus' posture. To humble Himself to the point of death on a cross. For you are precious to Him. His priorities were never mixed up. He always put you first. Nothing could ever come between Him and you. Nothing could ever prevent Him from suffering and dying for you.

And because He did, my friend, you are forgiven. Forgiven for not putting Him first. Forgiven for neglecting your greatest need far too often. Jesus forgives each and every one of you.

And here at His Table He gives this forgiveness to you with His own flesh and blood. Here He bids you come as a Mary. For He is the Host, and here He feeds you with heavenly food.

Do not think that you sit here as Mary and leave to be a Martha out there. You are always a Mary, invited to sit day after day at the feet of your Lord. And as a Mary, you will serve like a Martha, yet not neglecting the one thing needful. Amen.