

Luke 10:38-42

The Missouri State Police have come up with a new warning slogan. Perhaps you've seen it. DWI is "driving while intoxicated." That one has been around a while. The new one is DWT..."driving while texting." It's a serious problem. They tell us that most accidents occur because of the driver being distracted. Have you ever seen someone, perhaps in the car ahead of you, looking down at their cell phone? It looks like they could be drunk from how their car swerves on the road. It's an accident waiting to happen. Now there is nothing wrong with texting. Cell phones are not sinful. But to become distracted with your cell phone while driving can be fatal. It's happening more and more frequently.

In the home of Mary and Martha at Bethany Jesus gave a stern rebuke and warning about being distracted. He was teaching, and Mary was sitting at His feet, but Martha was in the kitchen texting. What I mean is that she was distracted. She was engaged in the process of serving a meal for Jesus. Now it's not wrong to serve a meal. And serving the Lord is a privilege for His Christians. But when our serving distracts us from the one thing necessary, it becomes a serious problem.

But that's not how Martha saw things. To her way of thinking, her sister Mary is the one who was distracted. Jesus was in their home. The top priority therefore, in her mind, was to prepare a sumptuous dinner. His needs must be met. They were the hostesses, He was the guest. Nothing must be allowed to distract Mary and Martha from the task at hand.

But something does. Mary leaves her sister in the kitchen and sits down at the feet of Jesus to listen. How dare she do that! You can picture busy Martha there in the kitchen. Her joy in welcoming Jesus into her home being replaced with irritation. Perhaps she banged a few pots together hoping to grab Mary's attention. With every minute that went by, her anger increased. Finally she could take it no longer. She walks up to Jesus and says, "Don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me!" Not only is Martha upset with her sister; she now speaks rudely to Jesus.

The day, for Martha, was not going well was it? It's not that she didn't love Jesus. She welcomed Him and desired to serve Him. But she was, nonetheless, a little upset at Him. He was keeping Mary out of the kitchen and He didn't seem to care in the least. Martha's car was swerving all over the road. She was so distracted with all that she was doing for Jesus, that she was losing sight of the one thing necessary.

What distracts you? And don't say, "Nothing." I know better. I'm human as you are, and like you I'm a sinner and I become distracted. What distracts you from the one thing necessary--from sitting at the feet of Jesus, from hearing His words downstairs and up here in church, from reading and studying His words at home? What distracts you?

It may be something which, of itself, is not wrong. Hunting, fishing, biking, hiking, mowing, and sleeping are not wrong...except on Sunday morning. Then they are a distraction from the one thing necessary. It may be something commendable and noble. Taking care of your family is a privilege and responsibility. But to put the chores at home as a priority over sitting at Jesus' feet is a distraction from the one thing necessary. It may even be, as with Martha, something which serves the Lord. Planning a church meeting, dinner, or fund raiser is good and proper...except when it's done in a way which distracts us from sitting at Jesus' feet and listening attentively to His words.

Jesus had some words of rebuke for Martha, and we need to listen to them, for very often you and I are like Martha. "You are anxious and troubled," He told her, "about many things. But one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her." If Martha had put down her utensils for a few minutes and joined Mary at the feet of Jesus, is it not true that her troubles and anxiety, her anger and irritability would have soon gone away? How much better to keep the cell phone off and wait until the car has stopped before using it. And how much better for a Christian who loves the Lord to set aside all distractions when it's time to listen at Jesus' feet. That's what Jesus was telling Martha, and that's what He tells us. No Voters meeting, or Council or Board meeting, no usher's or greeter's duties, no sausage dinner or Easter breakfast ought to be a distraction from the one thing necessary.

Now these words are not for the non-Christians out there. They are for you who love the Lord. Martha loved the Lord and yet He needed to rebuke her. Her distractions were a problem for her. She was placing a higher priority on what she did for Jesus than on what He did for her. That's our problem too. Christians desire to serve--their Lord, their family, their fellow Christians. And we may think that we're not good Christians unless we're serving in such ways. Jesus says, "No" to that. The highest and best worship there is, is to sit at His feet and receive His words of life. Mary, not Martha, shows us what being a Christian is all about. Oh don't misunderstand. Mary served her Lord also, as she did in John 12, but her serving did not distract her from hearing and receiving.

And that's tough to do. It's tough to sit still and listen in church. It's tough to clear our minds of all our plans and preparations and focus on the one thing necessary. It's tough, when we're used to taking action, to sit for an hour downstairs or for five minutes at home and be one who is taught by the Lord. It's tough because we are unable on our own to do this. Our sinful flesh does not want to sit at Jesus' feet. Our weak minds are easily distracted. Our self-centered hearts think it's more important what we do for God than what He does for us.

Mary did not sit at the feet of Jesus because she was better than Martha. It was God's grace that sat her down there. A heart that desires the Lord's words is not of our making; it is a gift of God. You can be like Mary not by trying harder, but by God acting in mercy toward you. He invites you to listen to His words of grace. He calls you to receive His gifts. He puts His Spirit within you as His words come into your ears, so that like a baby desiring his mother's milk, you long for the pure milk of the Word.

As you are gathered here at the feet of the Lord by His grace, you can be sure that He is not distracted. His whole attention is on you. His one desire is to work in your heart. You are His highest priority...and it has always been this way. How tempting it was for Him to give His Father an excuse and walk away from the cross. But He would not let Satan distract Him. He fixed His eyes on the joy set before Him. He set His course for Calvary, for nothing could prevent Him from dying for you.

And today nothing distracts Him from being here for you. His words to you are never empty words. He always fills them with His life and promises for you. His Sacrament is never just bread and wine; He is always in these things for you to receive. Even though we do not always make Him our highest priority, you are always highest for Him, and He forgives you for often putting Him second. Even though you and I worship too often like Martha, after His Law rebukes you, in love He gathers you to His feet where He pours out for you His mercy and pardon.

Now we don't know if Jesus' words changed Martha. The story ends without telling us whether she went back to her kitchen, or whether she humbly sat with Mary at the feet of Jesus, with the thinking, "Dinner can wait; this is where I need to be." But what matters most is your story. Will our Bible Class downstairs grow? Will more members be faithful in coming to church to listen attentively to God's saving Word? Will you be in that Word more in your home? By God's grace may the answers be "Yes!" Yes, because Jesus is here for you with all His gifts. Yes, because He is at work within you. Yes, because as God's Christian people, forgiven of all your sins, knowing that God is for you, you desire above all things, He who is the one thing necessary. Amen.