

Have a Mary Morning & a Martha Day

(Luke 10.38-42)

Purpose and Recap:

Our goal today is to learn how can we seek first the Kingdom, and let the Kingdom flow in service through the rest of our day.

Last sermon, we talked about the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the core lesson of the parable is that love is not theory; it's action. "Go and do likewise" are Jesus' final words to his audience.

Luke follows up the Samaritan's parable with the teaching about contemplation. Working for Jesus and spending time in his presence are two sides of the same coin. Most of us struggle to harmonize a text like this; instead, our solution is often to create a dichotomy between things: listening vs. serving; contemplative character vs. active character. If we were to see these two items as being in conflict, we would have missed the whole point of what Jesus is teaching here today. Hence, that's precisely the rebuke in the story: Martha had become an "only serving" type of disciple.

The Rabbi never said that serving is wrong; he only said that Mary's had found the "one thing." What's that one thing? The living words and the sweet presence of Jesus himself.

1. How can we have a Mary morning and a Martha day? With Wisdom.

If Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet, we know that wisdom comes from his mouth:

- "There's a time for everything," said Solomon, and "First things first," says the popular wisdom.
- There's, therefore, a time to pray and seek the Lord's face in private, and there's a time to serve him and others.

Illustration: There's a cool experiment where a person was given a bunch of rocks and sand, and he was supposed to fill the jar with both. On the first trial, he put the sand in first and then put the rocks in, and it didn't go well; the jar couldn't be closed. On his second trial, he put the rocks in first, and then he poured the sand into the jar. The sand filled every void at the bottom, working its way up to the top of the jar; the jar was successfully closed.

Our devotional life with God is like the rocks; it should come first, and then all the rest will find its proper place naturally.

APP: At Jesus' feet we find that "one thing:" wisdom.

2. How can we have a Mary morning and a Martha day? With the Word.

If Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet, we know that Scriptures is flowing from his mouth:

There are two stories in the Bible that illustrate the harmony our Lord is teaching here today: the early church in Acts and the woman at the well in John 4.

A) The early church

The early church was growing under the leadership of the Apostles. At a certain point, there was an issue involving the serving of tables—there was food being distributed to the Hebrew widows, but none to the Greek ones.

At that moment, the Apostles were faced with a dilemma: Shall we devote ourselves (literally, "invest our time") to the distribution of food, or should we delegate that task to others and devote ourselves to prayer and the teaching of the Word of God?

They delegated the task to seven deacons, and they devoted themselves to the studying and teaching of the Word of God.

On a macro scale, that's exactly what this story of Mary and Martha is all about. Serving should never come at the expense of our personal life with Jesus and the centrality of the Word of God in the corporate assembly of God's people.

You have heard me say it before, and it fits this sermon: If you take away the centrality of the Bible from our service and creeds, we will rapidly dilute ourselves into a mere community center!

B) The woman at the well

Jesus said something intriguing to the lady at the well: If you knew who the one asking you for water was, you would rather ask him for water, and he would give you living water!

This also precisely depicts Mary and Martha's story: Martha is trying to give Jesus food, while he was giving a spiritual banquet at the table—and she was most welcome at it.

APP: At Jesus' feet we find that "one thing:" Scriptures.

3. How can we have a Mary morning and a Martha day? With Worship.

We expect Jesus to course-correct someone who is overworking in order to make lots of money or someone who is indulging in sin; but when Jesus course-corrects

Martha for “ministry activism,” we get surprised! Because we so often give praise to those who are “busy with ministry!”

The major difference between Mary and Martha is in their eyes: Mary’s eyes were looking at the “one thing;” while Martha was looking elsewhere:

She was distracted in the work.

When Martha complains that her sister wasn’t helping, she reveals that her eyes are on her sister instead of on Christ.

There was no one busier than Jesus, yet he never complaint! He always had time for his Father; that was the secret of his ministry: He was never empty, but always full of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

She was distracted from the person of Jesus.

Jesus’ reply implies that Martha was missing something very important—not just the teaching of the Word of God, but rather, the simplicity of Christ himself.

If Herod, Pilate, the Sadducees, and Pharisees were the ones at the table, they would demand to be treated like kings. But Jesus is meek and simple: “Just a little is enough...”

She was distracted from Jesus’ purpose.

The Lord states in Mark that he didn’t come to be served, but to serve.

How could she possibly please her Rabbi? By hearing his teaching!

Burnout symptoms: distraction, anxiety, and trouble.

Her distraction affected her on a personal way, what she was feeling in her days, we call “burn-out” in our days. In the original, the word “distracted” could be translated this way: “Martha was everywhere/all over the place,” or “Martha was overwhelmed with work.”

There are MANY full-time ministers suffering from burnout. There’s a famous book called *Leading on Empty*, which talks about ministers who lead a whole congregation but are empty themselves due to the religious activism that robbed them of enjoying quality time with God.

“One can only give what he has;” if he is empty, he can’t give much! In sum, Martha was serving outwardly, but inwardly she was distracted. We should curb our distractions in order to efficiently worship the Lord.

Conclusion — How can we have a Mary morning and a Martha day? Let's learn from Mary herself.

- I would be unfair to the text if I didn't invite us to put ourselves into Martha's shoes.

In her culture, hospitality is not optional; it's mandatory. To not treat a guest well was the greatest disrespect—especially if that guest is the Lord!

You remember Jesus once rebuked a Pharisee because he had entered his house, and he didn't "kiss his hand," "anoint him," nor "wash his feet"—which were basic hospitality practices back in his days.

Also, in her culture, the ladies didn't sit at the Rabbi's feet; only men did. Jesus was a revolutionary Rabbi, allowing ladies to sit at his feet. We find such an action beautiful nowadays, but in his days, it took courage for someone to do it.

Moreover, in **any** culture and in **any** house, there is LOTS of work! Mind you, serving Jesus plus (probably) 12 of his disciples. If we were to receive 13 guests in our house, we wouldn't have time to sit at the Lord's feet too! Right?

But the answer is, surprisingly, a yes! Yes, it's possible to both serve Christ and sit at his feet; Mary is the proof of that! She is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, and she is always at Jesus' feet:

1. Here in this story.
2. When Lazarus, her brother, passed away, she weeps at Jesus' feet to mourn.
3. One week before Jesus' cross, she anointed his feet with oil.

- Lastly, we obviously learn from the best of the best: the Lord himself.

There was no one busier than Jesus, yet he always had quality time with his Father. And the other side of the coin is also true: There was no one busier than Jesus, yet he always had time for people.

This story really touches my heart as a pastor. It's shocking to see that the very moment when Jesus entered the house was the moment when Martha got distracted—that's so counterintuitive!

Translating this scene to our modern times, you would think that the moment someone becomes a full-time minister, that would be the very time when he would have more intimacy with Christ because he doesn't need to commute or devote 40 hours a week to a secular job...

From a personal perspective, I have been both a part-time and a full-time pastor, and I can assure you that “sitting at Jesus’ feet” is not a matter of time and opportunity, but a matter of principle and heart.