

The One Thing We Need

A sermon on Luke 10:38-42 by Pastor Jason Liebenow

She had just finished vacuuming the living room. After that she had to check on how the chicken was cooking, cut up the carrots and add them in too. Then she would have some time to finish vacuuming, clean the bathroom, finish dinner, and hopefully sweep the kitchen before the guests arrived.

But on the way to the kitchen, she looked in the living room and saw her son watching TV. “What are you doing?” she asked, in disbelief that he would do nothing when there was so much to do.

Maybe some of you are having déjà vu right now. That was a story from my sermon two weeks ago. In today’s gospel lesson, we see a similar story play out, but this time with a twist ending: Jesus tells us that the one who was just sitting there was doing the right thing!

Today we will take a deeper look in to this account of Jesus at Mary and Martha’s house as we think about the one thing we need.

In our Gospel lesson, we first hear about Martha, a passionate, energetic woman. She knows and loves Jesus deeply and so when she hears that Jesus is in the area, she jumps at the chance to welcome him and his disciples into her home!

She was so happy to be able to serve Jesus in this way. After all, she knew how Jesus lived. He was always traveling and he didn’t even have a place of his own where he could just rest his head. Martha wanted her house to be a place where Jesus could do just that! He did so much for other people and she wanted to do this for him.

So she invites Jesus into her house and right away she and her sister Mary get to work. Martha wanted everything to be just right. She wanted the place to look nice. She wanted the food to be perfect. This

was Jesus after all! You can't have a more special guest in your house than Jesus!

Jesus came in and sat down, but there was still so much to do. Martha couldn't wait to get everything done so that she could sit and listen to Jesus teach. So she kept going at it. Just a couple more things and then she would be done. Then, suddenly, she walked passed the room where Jesus and his disciples were and she saw her sister, Mary, sitting in there too!

She stopped for a moment in disbelief, but quickly remembered all that she had to do before she could sit down too, so she kept going. The whole time though she just kept thinking about Mary. "How could she leave me to do all this work by myself?" she thought. "I could be just sitting there too, but then who would take care of our Honored Guest?" "I hope this isn't too awkward for Jesus. He must see me running around doing all this work while Mary just sits there. Maybe I should say something."

She kept working, but the jobs just wouldn't seem to end. As she kept thinking of more and more things that needed to get done, she began to worry she would never finish! Finally, she asked Jesus, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?" But Jesus' answer completely floors her. "Mary has chosen what is better?"

In a world where many people prefer the slogan "deeds, not creeds," this gospel lesson makes no sense. Most would probably hold up the person who is out in the world showing God's love to everyone around them over the person who just sits in church Sunday after Sunday. But Jesus tells us, like Martha, that we have more to learn.

What did Martha do wrong? In a sense, she was not doing anything sinful. She was earnestly trying to serve Jesus, which is a godly thing. But what she did left her open for temptation. The problem

was she did not have her priorities straight. She wanted to serve Jesus so much that she forgot who he was.

Jesus came to serve and not to be served. Jesus came to take away our sin, to make us right with God by his life, death, and resurrection! Jesus came to give us eternal life with him, the one thing that can never be taken away from us! But in Martha's busyness, she missed that. She saw Jesus too much as the recipient and not enough as the Giver. She saw him too much as the object of her care and not enough as the great Host who cares for us all.

And in this wrong thinking, Martha made things so much harder on herself. She started feeling anxious and troubled about whether or not she could get everything done. She started to feel resentment toward her sister for not helping her. She was so focused on doing and not enough on listening, so focused on serving Jesus that she wouldn't let Jesus serve her. Some Christians can live in this pattern of thought for so long that they lose all the joy of being a Christian and in the end they just feel guilt over not doing enough and resentment for their fellow Christians.

But Jesus shows her and us a better way. Jesus lovingly reached out to Martha to show her what truly was important. The true service to God is hearing and learning Christ's Word. We cannot serve God unless God's Word is already in us! To hear and learn the teachings of Jesus with an open heart is better than any work, labor, sacrifice, or suffering. If we close our ears or turn our hearts away from God's Word, no matter the reason, it will end in disaster, because God's Word alone is the life stream for our faith! If we are not hearing it regularly, we are allowing our faith to wither!

Brothers and sisters, let us learn from our Savior today and every day by staying in the Word. When Mary got caught up in the busyness of life, we can see that she even started to doubt that Jesus cared about her. Do not fall into the same trap. Instead, stay in the one thing needful! Stay in God's Word. There we hear about all Jesus

purposefully went through, so that he could save your soul! When we hear God's Word tell us about Jesus being beaten, whipped, and hung on the cross, all so that we might escape God's punishment, when we hear from God's Word, there can be no doubt that God loves us, even when we face the harshest struggles of life!

Remember, Martha was not getting caught up in superfluous things. She was busy doing important things, things that had to get done! But she let them become more important than hearing God's Word. Nothing in our lives can ever get more important than hearing our Savior speak to us in the Word. It is in God's Word that we hear God's promises. In God's Word, we hear that God knows what we need, even better than we know. But he promises us that when we seek first his kingdom, and his righteousness, when we first seek to learn from him in his Word, God promises that he will provide all the other important things that we need!

All of Martha's work and worry did not help her, because there is only one thing needed. Not that she should have directed her work and worry toward hearing God's Word. No, we go to God's Word to be refreshed, to learn what is the truth, and to be served by our Savior. Stay in the Word, because there our God promises to give us new strength: strength that can get us through the worries of this life, strength that can overcome the devil's temptations, because it is a strength that is not our own. It is God's strength.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, life is busy. Every day, there is so much to do. But there is only one thing we NEED to do. Let us never forget that. Never allow anything to distract you from learning and thinking about God's Word. Listening to our God in his Word is the one thing we truly need. Amen.