

“Are you Mary or Martha?”

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Text Luke 10:38-42

I would like to invite the children to come to the front. My sister Mary and I would like to invite you into my house, and I would like to tell you a story.

Mary, we have company today. We must get everything ready and it is getting late. Oh look they are here. Jesus won't you and your friends come in and relax. – see Jesus is my friend. So Jesus and his disciples come in and sit down and relax. My friend Jesus starts to teach the disciples and my sister Mary.

(shift) Mary, she just left me here in the kitchen and went to hear what Jesus is saying over there – Excuse me a minute. Jesus, Jesus I am in the kitchen and Mary is here sitting at your feet – she should be in the kitchen helping me.

And Jesus said to me Oh Martha Martha you should not be upset with Mary – she is doing what everyone should be doing – do not take that gift away from her. We are all in some way like Mary and Martha. We can all help out doing things, but we must always remember to listen to Jesus and others.

Thank you

So who are you? Are you Martha or Mary? In Eugene H. Peterson's "The Message" Jesus says: "Martha, dear Martha you're fusing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it. It's the main course and it won't be taken away from her.

If we are like Martha we are always working hard and we are over-functioning. And if we are like Mary, we may sit and listen too long and then nothing gets done. Thinking of God's word as the main course in the feast of life, however, doesn't give us that immediate sense that listening is better than doing. Rather it places these activities in balance. We should remember that Jesus is the host, not Martha or Mary or anyone of us, and that Jesus spreads the word like a banquet to nourish and strengthen us. The word has within it commands both to sit and listen and go and do.

We find that our schedules pull us in many directions. We find it less complicating to keep moving ahead and keeping up with our calendar than it is make a change. The good news is that Jesus the host grants permission for all distracted, frantic people to sit down and eat their fill of word and promise. When

we join them and nourish ourselves at the table, we'll be ready to put hands and feet hearts and mind to work.

So, there's much to think about in this story. It suggests that sometimes our busyness isn't what it is meant to be. Sometimes it covers up our understandable resistance to grappling with fear and difficulty. Remember it is said that our busyness is the distraction. Its very design is meant to convince us that the distraction is what's important and to belittle the thing that's actually important. It stunts our spiritual growth, and it creates a mess in our families, institutions, our societies, and our planet.

In a world where too many of us get tied to e-mail, cell phones, texting and the like this is maybe a good message to hear.

There are times when we need to stop: sit and meditate, pray, go for a walk, go to a movie, laugh with friends, or read a good book. While some of these are not specifically listening to the word of God, these provide an opportunity to switch our minds and our lives away from day-to-day work.

Even better, spend time in prayer and in the presence of God. God has difficulty entering a mind that is caught up in business of the day, whoever we are and whatever we do. Taking a break opens us up to the presence of God and a chance for learning and growth. This is what Mary chose and we are always invited to do the same. Sylvia Boorstein says that when life gets overwhelming and she takes on too many things, she needs to increase her time in prayer and meditation. That can seem to be out of character for some, because when life seems to overtake us, prayer is often one of the first things to go. But Sylvia says that prayer is very important because it strengthens not only our mind but also our whole being. She maintains that without prayer in our lives we cannot be of any use to God or other human beings. We can all make excuses as to why we can not pray or meditate, but if we would just be still for a moment we would be able to hear Jesus saying to us : OH YES YOU CAN!

You see Mary took the initiative to sit at Jesus' feet, but Martha may be saying something like this: I'm liberal up to a point. I'll take the initiative to welcome you into my home, but I'm reluctant to go all the way in discipleship. And Jesus would respond with something like this. Dare to go all the way. Your house can take care of itself. Others can be invited to help with that. You see no one can do the learning for you. No one else can listen with your ears and heart and absorb the words of God. You see Martha you are the one who needs to be listening to the word. We are all called to listen.

Putting it off, making excuses, finding other things to do is never an excuse. We can find that as we listen, we get excited to do more.

There is need of only one thing Jesus tells us. If we will open ourselves to the word of God and the call to discipleship, we find the rest of things fall into place.

Amen