

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 6C (Proper 11C)
July 20, 2025
Luke 10:38-42

What To Do?

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42 ESV)

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

Last week we heard a lawyer ask Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). When asked what the law said, the lawyer said, in effect, "Love God. Love your neighbor." He thought eternal life was all about what **we** do. Jesus, though, showed that life with God is about receiving His mercy and compassion first and foremost, being served by Jesus, and only then showing that same mercy and compassion to others.

Today we hear of two women. One is busy serving Jesus. The other is listening to Him. Which is better? Which is more important? Jesus tells us.

Certainly, Martha was doing good. After all, she was serving Jesus. She was busy with a host of hospitality tasks. And hospitality was a big deal. Consider the trouble that Abraham went through to welcome and receive the three men who were standing in front of him. He almost had to beg them to stay with him a bit while he had water wrought to wash their feet, and to rest while he had a meal prepared for them. While having Sarah make some cakes out of flour, Abraham "ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate." (Gen. 18:7-8). There's a lot of work involved to welcome someone and show hospitality.

Indeed, like Martha, we too are often anxious and troubled about many things, and we too are often distracted with much serving. There are a host of things clamoring for our service in church, home, and in the community. There's almost no end to fixing things, cleaning things, preparing luncheons, doing whatever else needs to be done. So it's good to hear some comforting words for weary servers.

Yes, Martha was “anxious and troubled about many things” and was “distracted with much serving.” Likewise, she complained to Jesus that Mary wasn’t helping her with the necessary hospitality tasks. “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” Isn’t that just like us? Don’t we complain that we do the work and someone else doesn’t? Don’t we think that Jesus doesn’t care that we’re doing the work while others merely come to church? Don’t we wish we could tell Jesus to tell those others to get busy and help?

Yet, Jesus gently answers her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” Yes, serving is good, and it’s important, but there is something better and more important.

Yes, sitting at the Lord’s feet and listening to His teaching is indeed the one thing needful. It’s not that serving the Lord and His church with much serving is wrong or bad. In fact, it is good and can be very helpful. But it is not the one thing needful. The problem comes when we are so busy serving that we don’t do the more needful thing of sitting at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ and listening to His Word and receiving from Him – this truly is the one thing needful. It is the one thing, the only thing, that will give us life, the one thing that will give us what we need, the one thing that we must receive as a gift, because we cannot produce it on our own, no matter how hard we work – but which will, at the same time, enable and empower our dedicated serving in ways that are helpful to the church.

Sitting at the feet of Christ and listening to Him is the one thing needful. Here’s why. We have a need only He can meet. It is the need of forgiveness, the need of salvation. And we cannot meet that need that on our own, by our own work. No, our ways and our works are tainted with sin. Even the working and the serving of a dedicated woman like Martha – she needed forgiveness, she needed salvation.

And so do you and I. Our deeds are befouled with our sinful, selfish thoughts and desires – the desire for applause and approval, the desire to make ourselves look good, to pull a “one-up” over our fellow church members. Yes, even in our “much serving,” we do these things. And these sins are evidence of our inner sinful nature, from which we cannot free ourselves. We still need, even as Christians, God’s forgiveness and cleansing.

That’s why Christ came, my friends, to meet that need we could never meet. As our Epistle from Colossians tells us, “You, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he – Christ – has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.” (Col. 1:21-22). It is the much serving of Christ that saves us! He chose to serve creation, to serve you and me, by His innocent suffering and sacrificial death. The Son of God, by the blood He shed for us on the cross, cleanses us from our sins, frees us from our bondage to death, liberates us for new life and service, and forgives us, time and time again, whenever we become anxious and troubled and distracted.

That's why we need to learn from Mary to sit at our Lord's feet and receive from Him. That's why you have come here this morning. Mary, you have chosen the good portion, and that will not be taken from you. For here, we are listening to our Lord speak His words of comfort and assurance to us. "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28). This is what our Savior is saying to all us weary, wiped-out servers today. Martha, come and sit here and receive forgiveness for your sins. Come and lay down your burden and listen for a while. Come and eat and drink of the feast of life. Come and receive new life and strength for renewed, dedicated service. Indeed, even Paul served with the strength he got from Christ, "For this [that we may present everyone mature in Christ] I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." (Col. 1:29). God grant that we so listen to Jesus' teaching, that we rest in Him, and also serve as He gives us strength and opportunity to serve. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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