

Sermon, St. David's, 7/17/2022, Luke 10:38-42 (Elizabeth Felicetti)

Oh great, it's Martha and Mary Sunday. This five-verse story tends to annoy everyone, except maybe those who consistently try to get out of washing the dishes. On Thursday, I sat with Travis Kennedy after she checked kids in to Vacation Bible School, mostly because I adore Travis and wanted to check out the kids, but also because I wanted to put off writing a sermon about Mary and Martha.

Travis and I talked about this story, and about the times we have felt like Martha and the times we've felt like Mary. Traditionally in this story contemplation is pitted against action, but that is not what Jesus was getting at.

I don't want to tell Travis's stories, but here's one from me that Travis told me I should put in this sermon. My mom was big on helping in the kitchen, and she judged everyone for what they did to help around her house, including all of my friends and every boyfriend I ever had. We had a huge, blended family, so every gathering was a party. The first Thanksgiving she and my dad were married we had more than 40 people, and while a few died out over the years, more were married and had children so 40 stayed about average for a family dinner.

That meant lots of dishes and set up and take down and sweeping and wiping. She noticed people who didn't "help" and talked about them behind their backs.

My mom was the greatest, and I miss her so much. But she spent too much time in the kitchen, bossing people around and being annoyed when some didn't help. We were always telling her, "Get out of the kitchen and come sit down and talk to us" or to Uncle Peter or whoever. She would say, "I will when the work is finished." The work was never finished.

I was determined that she was not going to spend her 69<sup>th</sup> birthday party in the kitchen. I offered to bake her a carrot cake even though I hated them, because we always had them at birthday parties, so I assumed it was her favorite. But to my surprise, she told me that her favorites were actually lemon cake and spice cake. So I baked one of each, touched that I had not known these were her favorite cakes even though by that point she and Dad had been married for 25 years. I made both cakes and prepared most of the food, set the table, hosed off all the outside furniture myself instead of letting her help, far enough in advance that it was all dry by the time of the party. I don't remember who all was there but I'm sure it was at least 40 people, this that was our norm. I was pleased with myself in the kitchen while she sat outside for once, enjoying our family. Her sister Pat came in the kitchen, and I said, "Isn't this great? I got her out of the kitchen!"

Pat replied, "Sure, except you replaced her. Here you are visiting all the way from Virginia, but we haven't seen you out there because you are in here fixing your two cakes and washing dishes and trying to make everything perfect exactly like she normally does."

In my quest to get Mom to become what we might erroneously call a Mary instead of a Martha I had turned into a Martha myself. And that's one problem. Another problem is that these two women are not the dichotomies they appear to be in this short story. We are not a Mary *or* a Martha. Both of these women, these people, are needed in any spiritual and family life.

The Gospel of John contains a fuller picture of these sisters alongside their brother Lazarus, whom Jesus famously raised from the dead. In those longer stories, Martha was a confident leader who went out to meet Jesus when he came to them after the death of Lazarus and told him that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had been there. She did not hesitate to tell Jesus what she thought, just like she did not in the Luke short story. Martha clearly knew Jesus well and was unafraid of his opinion. She was a bold, confident leader.

In the Gospel of John, Mary did not sit and listen but instead anointed Christ's feet with expensive nard, also a bold action. These two sisters worked together in the Gospel of John instead of against each other.

This Luke story is one small anecdote in a much larger story, making it appear that the sisters are at different ends of a spectrum. When Jesus says that Mary has chosen the better part, he is not saying that the invisible labor of those who bake the cake and wash the dishes is unimportant. Jesus is saying to Martha, "let's all sit down together and connect." I want Jesus to further say, "Don't worry Martha: we are not going to leave you with a mountain of dirty pots and pans and wineglasses. Come sit down, and then later the disciples and I will help you clean up." I hope that he said all that and Luke just didn't bother to write it down.

Jesus' larger point was distraction from relationship. Martha was distracted and not investing her full attention to these relationships. The Lord was in her house, and she wanted to make everything perfect for him instead of sitting down to spend time *with* him.

This has implications for our church worship life as well as our personal lives. I will not denigrate those who volunteer all the time because this place would close down without them. We are so blessed by those who step up to work like Martha did, like Cathy Alonso, Patti Musial, and Ginny Butler pulling weeds in scorching heat of July, or like the volunteers over the course of Vacation Bible School the past week who ended up outnumbering the children. We need them. We could not have church without them.

What Jesus is saying as regards to church is more along these lines: we want worship to be pleasing to the Lord, but sometimes we get caught up in someone mispronouncing a word or hitting a wrong note or a distracting noise or other little imperfections instead of sitting and spending time with God: worshipping God with our whole bodies.

In our personal lives, when we are with the people we love most, are we focusing on them or are we busy and distracted by many tasks? I'm not speaking to only the women here. This is not a female dilemma. Men are also busy and distracted. In our society we boast about our busyness. We are too busy, we proudly proclaim, to do things that others find important.

We don't impress anyone with our busyness. Instead of bragging about how busy you are, examine your life to see if your priorities are in the right place.

Would Jesus think that your priorities are in the right place?

Remembering our baptismal creed, do you take time to listen to God through the apostle's teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?