

Sermon on Mary & Martha Luke 10 Mary and Martha or Martha and Mary

Aim: Listening

Luke 10:38-42

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen please sit down.

Today I want us to think about listening.

The story for today involves Mary, Martha and their brother, Lazarus. We know that, Mary, Martha and Lazarus were good friends of Jesus. Jesus probably visited their home in Bethany often. We believe that Martha owned the home and so we assume that she was the oldest sister. We know that Jesus deeply loved Lazarus. We also know that Jesus had become the most famous rabbi in the land; he had become enormously popular and well known. And we know that Jesus, the famous rabbi, was coming to the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus for dinner.

And Martha, the oldest, was going to plan and prepare the dinner for Jesus.

So we can imagine Martha going to market the day before the feast in order to get the freshest food available. She may have found some fresh fish that had been brought in from the Jordan River. And dates and pomegranates and figs and raisins and nuts. And the finest of wines that she could find. What a shopping spree that was, and the next morning,

Martha was a flurry of activity, busy cleaning the house and the yard before she began to prepare the feast for Jesus, the famous rabbi coming to her house.

How exciting. She set the table with her finest, bringing out her brass seven armed candle stick, and her favourite pottery ware. It was the time of arrival and Jesus knocked on the door, and everyone was so excited to see Jesus. They laughed and chatted and Jesus noticed how clean and prepared the house was, and Martha was pleased. Jesus sat down on a pillow in the front room and started to teach. And soon Martha was out in the kitchen, so busy, so focused on her last minute preparations, and she was irritated that she couldn't hear the conversation between Jesus and her younger sister in the living room. The more Martha worked, the more frustrated she got with her sister, sitting in the living room, cheerfully listening to Jesus. So Martha started to send signals to her sister, banging the pots and pans together so that the noise would bring her sister into the kitchen. It didn't work.

So Martha walked into the living room to serve the starters the wine, the cheese, the crackers, and as she walked by Mary, she gave Mary an eyeball

roll, rolling her eyeballs in the direction of the kitchen. But Mary wasn't looking. Soon, from the kitchen, Martha returned to the living room to pick up the leftovers from the starters, and gave her sister another signal, this one the rolling shoulder motion, rolling her shoulder and arm in the direction of the kitchen. Mary, again, did not respond. She was still focused on Jesus and his words. So Martha finally stood in the kitchen door and her anger could not be contained any longer: "Jesus, would you tell Mary to come into the kitchen and help me with all this work. She is taking advantage of her being the youngest again, so as to get out of doing the work." Jesus spoke to Martha calmly, "Martha, Martha, don't be so upset. You are busy and distracted with many things. Mary has chosen the better path, listening to me, and this will not be taken away from her." Martha put her hand on her hips, said "hrumpff," and stomped back into the kitchen to finish the meal."

And thus ends the story.

We need to put in a good word for Martha. Firstly I remind you that if there were no Marthas, or perhaps the male equivalent, Marcus, many people, would not eat lunch or dinner. I also think that it would have been fairer if Mary had gone to Martha and said, "Let's both listen to Jesus and then let's both go and work in the kitchen."

Martha has become a symbol of action-oriented people, responsible people, men and women who get the job done. And the world needs men and women and boys and girls who get the job done.

This is certainly true in the church. How would the church even survive if not for the Marthas and Marcus' who do all the jobs needed. The same is true with the family. We need responsible people to do the work of the house: to cook, to clean, to keep the house operating, to pay the bills, to keep the cars running, not to speak of bringing up the children. Households can't survive without Marthas and Marcus'. Nor can offices. Nor can schools. Nor can businesses.

What is wrong with being a Martha? A Marcus? A responsible, get it done, kind of person?

Nothing. Jesus did not fault Martha for being responsible. Martha's fault is that she was ... too busy to listen ... too distracted to sit at his feet and absorb his presence ... too busy living life to quietly hear what Jesus had to say ... too involved with all her activities and actions that she didn't find time to first listen to the voice of Christ.

Martha has become a symbol of the modern world. No, more than that, Martha has become a symbol of you and me who have become so active and

busy with living life, we no longer have time to slowly quietly listen to God or even our partner, children or friends.

What is listening?

Listening is focusing on another; it is concentrating on the person or thing before me, giving them my undivided attention.

Listening is an art that is learned and slowly developed where you actually focus on that person before you. Not the history of everything that has happened earlier today or before. Not on the future and all the activities that will occur later today or this week. Not on the side about everything that is occurring right now at this moment. Listening focuses on that one person, not on the past, not on the future, not on all the stuff going on right now. Listening is a gift; it is an art; it is a learned behaviour.

The more one listens, the more love grows. The less one listens, the less love there is. Listening is the conduit, the pipeline, through which love flows and grows.

It is true in good families. That is also true in good businesses. It is always listening first and then doing.

The Mary and Martha story is primarily concerned about Christian discipleship and listening to the voice of God and Jesus. To focus, to centre, to concentrate, on Christ and the words and spirit of Christ.

You know that this is true of your life, and I know it is true of my life. It is an art to listen to the voice of Jesus Christ in a sermon such as right now. It is an art to listen to the voice of Jesus Christ in our prayers when our minds are tempted to run so fast and far away. It is an art to listen to the voice of Christ as we are absorbed in reading the Bible when our minds are tempted to think about other things. Listening is a gift of oneself to the other, a centering, a concentrating of oneself on Jesus, and listening to his voice. Mary knew how to listen to Christ, and we are encouraged to do the same.

Jesus was coming to dinner at Mary and Martha's house. Instantly, Martha's mind went to work and she was soon busy planning the menu, busy cleaning the house, so distracted and pleased that she was living life to the fullest. The meal was ready and Jesus knocked on the door, and she knew he would be impressed with the meal, impressed with the cleanliness of the house, impressed with the immaculate condition of her gardens. And so they sat down to dinner and Mary remained at the feet of Jesus, listening to him, focusing on him, concentrating on his words and spirit. Martha, missed out on what he was saying.

And Jesus was most pleased with Mary's attitudes and he commended her for it.

Amen.

1404 words