

**The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 11C), July 21, 2019**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminster, Massachusetts

**Martha, Mary, and Jesus**

Luke 10:38–42

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*


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Today's Gospel reading: THE LORD ANSWERED 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" (vv 41–42).

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What was your week like? Were you busy and active with MUCH SERVING, on the go and preoccupied with your work, like MARTHA, as you WELCOMED Jesus into your life (v 40)? Or were you quiet and contemplative, like MARY, WHO SAT AT THE LORD'S FEET AND LISTENED TO HIS TEACHING (v 39)? Was yours a "Martha" week or a "Mary" week?

## 3.

For me, it was more Martha than Mary, and I've got a hunch the same could be said for everyone who helped with Vacation Bible School. (Thank you!) Here at church it was a week of hospitality – of welcoming and serving seventeen little ones in Jesus' name. And, as our Lord said, "WHOEVER RECEIVES ONE SUCH CHILD IN MY NAME RECEIVES ME" (Mk 9:37). Think about what that means. As we welcomed and spent time with the children this week, it means we were also serving Jesus.

There's other "Martha" work, too. More things Jesus identifies as serving Him. When ALL NATIONS are GATHERED BEFORE HIM and He SEPARATES the SHEEP from the GOATS, do you remember what He says to those astonished sheep as they INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR them FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD (Mt 25:32, 34)? Whenever in the flow of everyday life Christians serve others with food or drink, or show hospitality to strangers, or clothe those in need, or visit the sick or offer encouragement to those in prison – "TRULY, AS YOU DID IT TO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE MY BROTHERS, YOU DID IT TO ME," Jesus says (Mt 25:40). "In all these things, you serve Me."

And what about the “regular” work of life—your job, time volunteering and helping others, responsibilities at home and in the family, the duties of friendship? Unless we’re sick, injured, or have some other limitation—and some of us do bear such crosses and would gladly be rid of them!—unless we simply can’t, there’s a whole lot of Martha in many of our lives. The daily interruptions and demands of “real life” that come in the form of a crying baby, or a desperate phone call, or running an errand for a friend, or a request for prayer. Such things don’t look or feel like ways of serving Jesus, but they are. Whether or not we perceive Him, He’s there *in* the neighbor receiving what we do. Of all our callings from God, our vocations—those relationships that are simply part-and-parcel of being human and living in the body in time and space—St. Paul says, “WHATEVER YOU DO, WORK HEARTILY, AS FOR THE LORD AND NOT FOR MEN, KNOWING THAT FROM THE LORD YOU’LL RECEIVE THE INHERITANCE AS YOUR REWARD. YOU ARE SERVING THE LORD CHRIST” (Col 3:23–24). And one small subset of that is our service in the Church to our brothers and sisters here. If you’re on the servitor list today, then you’re called to be a little Martha serving Jesus among us.

About all this—whether it’s VBS or the good works done by Christians or our callings at home, at church, and in the world—we should be clear: Much of it is necessary and all of it is good when done in faith. If we’re able, we should be busy with serving or preparing to serve the Lord *in* our neighbors. Many of us, I know, carry a burden of guilt for not having done more or done better. We genuinely want to serve Jesus in these ways, yet I DO NOT DO THE GOOD I WANT (Rom 7:19). If your conscience accuses you, if it tells you that you’ve done too little or done it poorly or done what you should but with a sinful attitude, I’m right there with you. We’re poor, miserable sinners, even when we try our best to be good Marthas.

Now don’t misunderstand. Even when Jesus gently and lovingly chides Martha, it’s not because she was working to serve Him. Her work wasn’t the issue. What she was doing was good. In the big picture, Jesus CAME NOT TO BE SERVED (Mk 10:45), but in day-to-day matters of life, of His body, He received service. He permitted Himself to be anointed with oil (Lk 9:36–50). SOME WOMEN PROVIDED FOR Him and His apostles OUT OF THEIR MEANS (Lk 8:3). He had NOWHERE TO LAY HIS HEAD (Lk 9:58). So providing Him with food, drink, shelter, and so on, like Martha did, is good, as is doing such things in His name for others. Would that we all had Martha’s heart for the Lord!

## 2.

So if it’s not her serving that’s a problem, what is the problem? It’s not what she’s doing but *how* she’s doing it. She WAS DISTRACTED, literally, BEING DRAGGED AROUND, with her serving. You can imagine what it would be like if you had more than a dozen

people over for dinner or coming to stay at your house. You'd be in a tizzy, too! So SHE WENT UP TO Jesus AND SAID, "LORD, DON'T YOU CARE THAT MY SISTER HAS LEFT ME TO SERVE ALONE? TELL HER TO HELP ME! Why isn't she in a tizzy, like me?" (v 40). Do you see what's happened? First, Martha begins to think of serving Jesus as a burden rather than a joy. Second, instead of keeping her focus on Jesus as she serves, she focuses on her sister and becomes annoyed with her. Third, she draws attention to herself and her own work, especially in comparison to Mary. Her serving is good, but she allows it to become an occasion for sin. Isn't that the way with us, too?

"MARTHA, MARTHA," Jesus says. He knows His sheep. He calls them by name. "MARTHA, MARTHA, YOU ARE ANXIOUS AND TROUBLED ABOUT MANY THINGS" (v 41). Can you hear the tenderness and compassion in His voice? How His heart goes out to her in her anxious and troubled state? How His heart goes out to you when your serving drags you around and begins to feel like a burden and you lose your focus on Him and you start to resent others? Jesus draws her attention. What He gently and lovingly identifies and removes from her is the anxiety and trouble she brings into serving. Oh, yes, Martha, I care. Do you know how much? I care enough to listen to your complaint, and to take the many things you lay on Me, your sins, failures, and resentments, included, and to give you a far better portion in return!

1.

"YOU ARE ANXIOUS AND TROUBLED ABOUT MANY THINGS, BUT ONE THING IS NECESSARY" (v 42). To serve is good yet serving is valuable only for this life. So keep things in perspective. ONE THING is eternal. ONE THING will last. ONE THING remains forever. And it's not what Martha's doing. It's what Jesus is doing. It's what He's serving. It's the portion that comes from His sacrifice and from His table. By sitting at Jesus' feet, "MARY HAS CHOSEN THE GOOD, THE BETTER, the eternal PORTION, AND IT WILL NOT BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HER" (v 42). Jesus won't allow His word to be taken out of Mary's ears, or for Mary to be taken away from Him. Don't be so distracted and concerned about doing good that you neglect the one thing needful. Sit at the feet of Jesus, hear God's word, and receive the good portion!

This is more than a rebuke. Hear it as an offer of the same GOOD PORTION that Mary received. Hear it as an invitation to rest for a while at His feet, to be served by Him, to receive His hospitality. Come, Martha, and set down your bread and cup and take the bread I give and the cup I fill. Jesus welcomes you. He receives you into His home. He spreads a feast for you in His word.

For the good portion, the best portion, is found at the feet of Jesus. A sinful woman who WET HIS FEET WITH HER TEARS AND WIPED THEM WITH THE HAIR OF HER

HEAD AND KISSED HIS FEET AND ANOINTED THEM WITH OINTMENT found there at His feet what she most needed (Lk 7:38). “YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN” (Lk 7:48). And what did the man once possessed by demons do after Jesus liberated Him? He was AT THE FEET OF JESUS, CLOTHED AND IN HIS RIGHT MIND (Lk 8:35). St. Augustine describes Mary like this: “She sat at the feet of our Head. The more lowly she sat, the more abundantly did she receive. For the water flows together to the low hollows of the valley. It runs down from the risings of the hill” (*The Lutheran Study Bible* p. 1735). Like water running down a mountainside, grace and mercy cascade from Jesus to those who sit at His feet. To you.

My hope is built on nothing less! Jesus blood and righteousness! To be at the feet of Jesus is to be at the foot of the cross. From his head, his hands, his heart, his feet, the good portion streams. THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME. MY CUP RUNNETH OVER. The MERCY and GOODNESS of Jesus fill us and follow us (Ps 23:5, 6). He gives the ONE THING NECESSARY, the BETTER PORTION, and it will NOT BE TAKEN AWAY from us, just as it wasn’t taken away from Mary or from Martha. From Mary, learn to listen and keep on listening. Hold what Jesus says sacred. Gladly hear and learn it. Be a hollow of the valley that floods with His word. From the risings of Calvary, grace runs down. Believe what He says—Your sins are forgiven! Your serving is purified and made holy by His blood! Christ lives in you and works in and through you for good! What He does is enough! The best portion is for you! What He serves and what you receive at His feet WILL NOT BE TAKEN AWAY! Not even death could take Him away!

So, Martha, here you are, like Mary, receiving Jesus’ divine service. Here you are at His feet listening to His word. Here you are having the good portion in His body and blood. Here Jesus has served and is serving and will continue to serve you, and it’s no anxiety or trouble at all for Him to do it—again and again and again. He loves to serve you—to serve you with His life.

So, what was your week like? And what will this coming week bring? A “Martha” week or a “Mary” week? What started with Martha ended with Mary. So work like Martha, but let Jesus deal the anxiety and trouble, and sit like Mary to receive good things at His feet. But let’s wrap up the last week and begin the next not with our eyes on them but on the ONE THING NECESSARY—on Jesus. May He fill your week!

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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