

³⁸ While they were traveling, he entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.^[a] ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who also sat at the Lord's^[b] feet and was listening to what he said.^[c] ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, and she came up and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So tell her to give me a hand."^[d]

⁴¹ The Lord^[e] answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary.^[f] Mary has made the right choice,^[g] and it will not be taken away from her."

It's Faith

Abraham rushed around, giving orders and waiting on his guests. That little bite to eat, that tiny morsel of bread and a cup of water, turned out to be close to 70 quarts of flour, a fattened calf, and a master of the house waiting on his visitors like a servant. So why is it that Abraham did what was fitting and proper while what Martha does is often criticized and condemned? What did Abraham have that Martha did not? What is the one thing needful? What was Martha lacking? That's the one thing I want. This lesson has less to do with the 3rd Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy," and more to do with the Lord's service to you. But Paul writes, "Faith comes from hearing," and hospitality to the preacher cannot be separated from hospitality to his message.

What Martha needs, what you and I need is not more work, but we need to hear who Jesus is. We need faith to know and believe that is the Christ the son of God. That he is the one who came to serve, not to be served. That is what Mary saw. That's why she sat at his feet. Martha, however, seemed to have missed it.

But how? She was the one who invited Jesus into her own home. Luke describes Martha as the owner of the house who welcomed Jesus. This is the same word used when Jesus sends out the 72 in Luke 10:8, "*When you enter any town, and they welcome you, eat the things set before you.*" Martha welcomed him. She knew what needed to be done. She is doing something good! But you almost feel sorry for her. Maybe since she invited Jesus she felt responsible for feeding him, and the 12 men that followed him around everywhere... as well as her deadbeat sister Mary, and Lazarus (who isn't mentioned), but then there were also the crowds that tended to gather to hear Jesus and have him heal them. There were a lot of people. The work isn't going to get done on its own.

She has a lot on her mind. Maybe last week's lesson was still fresh in her mind. Jesus told us to go and do as the Good Samaritan went and did. But her work is dragging her around. We get the impression that she doesn't even want to be there. She would rather be sitting at Jesus' feet too. But Mary, she's being selfish, self-centered, and lazy. And who does Martha confront? She confronts Jesus. She does not recognize Jesus as the Lord and giver of life. She does not recognize Jesus as God otherwise she would not accuse him, "*Don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So tell her to give me a hand.*" That sounds a lot like the disciples on the Sea of Galilee in the storm, "*Don't you care that we are about to drown?*" And at that time Jesus responds to them, "*You of little faith,*" which can be taken as, "no faith." The accusation sounds like Genesis 3. God asks, "*Did you eat from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?*" *The man replied, "The woman you gave to be with me, she gave me some fruit."* If this was Mary's fault why does she confront Jesus? If Adam ate the fruit in the Garden, why blame God, "*the woman you put here with me*"?

Consider how Martha speaks to Jesus? She takes her stress out upon her guest. She drags Jesus into a family dispute and begins to order him around as if he is another one of her servants. "Jesus, you tell her to do what I want her to do!" Has she found confidence in the law? Does she now think her work puts her on par with Jesus? Does she think she is doing her part while Mary is just sitting around? Whatever the case, this won't end well for her. One thing is needful and it's not her work.

It's not even our work. If someone says "Salvation relies on our conduct, our works and not exclusively on our gracious God," then we would be right to respond, "They have lost the faith." That's harsh. But if we are trusting in our works to save then we are not trusting in Jesus. A faith not founded on Jesus cannot save. But it's easy to be

distracted and worried about many things. We too may forget who we are talking to. We too may forget who we approach in prayer. We forget what is needful and it isn't our works – not matter how good they may be. But I've preached this lesson as if the one thing needful is to sit and listen.

To, "*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.*" That means we should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching of his word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." But our gladly hearing and learning God's Word is often cut short. We're distracted and worried about many things. But even if we aren't, even if we sit at Jesus feet like Mary we should not find any confidence in our obedience to the law. Our works of gladly hearing and learning of holding the Sabbath sacred will not save us. The law is given to reveal sin –not to forgive sin

We need something more. We need what Scripture points us to. But the excuses roll in, "I can worship God out in nature or out on the golf course." Are you so certain? When was the last time a squirrel forgave your sins or a gopher administered the Lord's Supper? When was the last time you were able to confess your sin and receive forgiveness? What nature tells us is that all is not right with this world. It preaches the law. Why is the world the way it is? It's someone else's fault. And that is not repentance. That is Martha's response to her sister Mary. Repentance takes the blame. It admits, "This is my fault. I've got myself into this," rather than blaming others, even your sister who may or may not be named Mary, or the proverbial punching bag for all that is wrong in the world: God.

Just look at how we talk to God. We forget who comes to us, who he is, who we are. We'll order him around; treat him like a vending machine. Curse him when all fails and then blame him for what we've done. God should respond to us by taking away what little we have and giving it to someone else but instead look how gracious he is even with his host: Martha.

Martha thought that it was necessary, that the one thing needful was to take care of Jesus, to show him her love by the gifts she could bring and her service. But that wasn't the one thing needful. Mary had made the better choice and that would not be taken away from her. What was that? What is the one thing needful? Not works. Not even our sitting and listening at Jesus' feet. It's faith. Mary knows and believes that Jesus is the Christ having come into this world. This will not be taken away from her. Nothing can snatch her out of his hand. There is tremendous comfort in this passage. Mary has taken the posture of only two other people in Luke. She is like Mary – the sinner who sat at his feet wetting them with her tears. She is like the formerly demon possessed man. She knows who he is and she has faith that he will save.

The better portion she received was the Word of God from the Word made flesh. Her sins are forgiven. She can go in peace. It wasn't about what she could do for her Savior but it was about what he was doing for her. Jesus came into this world to serve, not to be served. Here Jesus serves both Mary and Martha. He serves Martha by pointing out her sin, what she lacks. Would we say she has fallen from faith? It's possible. She is like the seed sown on rocky soil, "*who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have not root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away*" (Luke 8:13). But her tender shepherd comes to her with his Word of grace. He corrects her in love. When a name is repeated twice it is a sign of endearment. Jesus continues to speak the word to her and yes she responds.

Later when Jesus comes again in John 11 its Martha who runs out to greet him but Mary stayed home. Martha said to Jesus, "*If you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.*" She makes the wonderful confession, "*I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world.*" Jesus came to serve. He did not come to make life such that we would not want to leave. He came to forgive sin to suffer what we deserve and to die in our place under God's wrath. The one thing needful is the gift that Jesus has come to bring: Faith. And faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

We sit at the feet of Jesus when we come in worship. Here we are blessed to hear his Word. We have the freedom to gather together and worship but do you remember how quickly that freedom can be taken away? We might not be able to gather as we want. That is one reason why we memorize God's Word. It's so that nothing can take it away from us. When we come to worship we don't call it the Divine Service for nothing. It's a good reminder who is serving who when we gather. It is not our gifts and offerings that are important. It is not our hymns or our prayers that earn anything. It is our God who comes to us. He gets down on his knees and washes our feet. He forgives our sin. He reminds us whose we are in baptism. He gives us himself, his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. We come not because we are earning any brownie points in heaven. We come because God serves us.

Our faith is in Jesus who lived and died for us. Who rose again and proclaims, "Peace be with you." Here in his word he comes again to us to remind us that our sins and half-hearted hospitality towards God's Word is forgiven. Here he comes to us, "*Christian, Christian, You are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is needful, and I've already taken care of that.*" We are often distracted by many things. The proper approach to worship is not that of busyness and doing but in the stillness of listening to the words of Jesus. Faith is the highest form of worship. It tells us all is done. God has taken care of everything. This faith won't be taken away.

That's the message we need to hear again and again. But some will say, "Eternal security can only lead to carnal security and neglect of sanctification." But what is faith if not the certainty of salvation? Eternal security leads to an increase of gratitude, joy and love for God and others. Our good will not earn a spot in heaven for us. They won't merit salvation. They are gifts of gratitude a response to the Word.

That may look like Abraham running around eagerly serving. It may look like Martha running around to serve Jesus but it will also look like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, letting him serve you. Amen