

Luke 10:38-42

10:38 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.

10:39 She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying.

10:40 But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me."

10:41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things;

10:42 there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Proclamation of the Word

We have just been invited to witness a family argument.

And if you are like me, I want to fade into the background when the conflict occurs between siblings Mary and Martha.

Brothers and sisters can get in tiffs, right?

Wouldn't it be great if Jesus was right there to adjudicate every debate and discussion like this!

In some ways he is, through prayer, Scripture, and the Holy Spirit.

In these next few summer weeks we focus on faithful action required of disciples.

And today we are in the home of two major disciples, Mary and Martha.

Jesus reminds us that listening to him is an essential action for disciples.

Listening is not passive.

It is the source and foundation of all of our action and service.

So let me affirm you and pat you on the back.

Of all the things you could do with these couple of hours, you have chosen to make hearing God's word and glorifying God in worship a priority.

Jesus is pleased, I know.

Maybe you have heard like I that the standard of faithful discipleship is Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him.

For she has chosen the necessary thing over Martha.

Martha just needs to chill and stop worrying about the roast burning or how nicely the table is set.

She just needs to stop being busy and be with Jesus.

Frankly, there are days, I need to remember to be like Mary, so I resonate with that. Luckily it is my job to study Scripture. It is built into my routine,

or I would be distracted doing all the things that seem to need to be done.

But even if listening to the word is built into your routine, there are still bills to pay, dentist appointments to arrange, work projects, groceries to buy, and grass to cut.

Martha is being a good disciple by showing hospitality and welcome her guest.

Even Abraham and Sarah entertained angels unawares when the three visitors showed up at their tent. Hospitality is biblical, right?

Maybe you have heard that Jesus is putting women in their place. Telling us these are the prescribed roles for women, saying Luke has a hidden agenda because women exercised leadership roles in the early Christian Community.

The active Martha, should sit still at the feet of Jesus and just listen silently.

But that does not square with what the gospel of Luke tells us about Jesus.

Preaching Professor Tom Long, writes, "Throughout Luke, women are not passive and silent; they are prominent, powerful, worthy, articulate, and celebrated. It is Luke, after all, who tells us Jesus' parable about a poor widow who was so vigorous and aggressive in her demands for justice that she caused a powerful and haughty male judge to cave in. No, this is not a story about resisting women's leadership. In fact, Mary, who sits at Jesus' feet in this story, is actually pictured in the posture of a disciple, an important role normally reserved in that day only for men."ⁱ

Or perhaps you have heard this as an either/or option.

Either you are a Martha or a Mary or a Matt or Marty.

And this little piece of Scripture gets boiled down to Martha=bad disciple and Mary=good disciple.

If we simply read this Scripture without reading it in context of the larger gospel, we could set up that false dichotomy.

The gospel of Luke has plenty of examples of us being called to faithful action and service.

Luke, of all the gospels, has a strongest concern for the poor, the sick, the left-out, and the lost who do not know Jesus.

In fact, this story is shared with us immediately on the heels of Jesus sending the twelve out on a mission followed by the parable of the Good Samaritan which we discussed last week.

Those certainly sound like calls to action, not just sitting around and studying the Bible, right?

This scripture requires a closer look.

I think Jesus is reminding us that we need to know the why we act.

Dwelling in the word and the presence of Jesus our Lord is the why behind our faithful action and service.

If we just want to help people because it makes us happy or
if we feel that it is expected of us, is really not serving because Jesus is Lord of our lives.
Both Mary and Martha refer to Jesus as LORD- four times, in fact.
So I think Jesus is reminding us that when Jesus is LORD of our lives, right action will follow.
Martha calls Jesus LORD, but she has forgotten why she serves.
She is distracted by making sure the table setting looks great and the bread is baked to perfection, and
what Jesus wants is her attention.

Mary seems to have chosen the needed thing,
which is to make Jesus the focus of her attention.

He is the why and the "because" of her service.

Whether the lamb is overcooked or the house is perfectly clean is really not the point. The point is the
PERSON, the relationship, the love with which she serves.

Maybe you can relate when you are talking to someone who cannot take their eyes off their
smartphone. Don't you want their full attention?

Sure, the church supply closets need to be organized, the casserole baked for a family in crisis, and
public service and action are needful, but needed because they serve God's mission and the Kingdom
of God.

Jesus calls us to reflect....to ask whom and why we serve?

Do we serve because Jesus is Lord of our life?

Do we serve because we are citizens of the kingdom of God?

Jesus calls us to start with WHY.

WHY is about intention and motivation.

Later we will commission our mission team to work with Water Mission in Charleston, and we
remember our mission travelers to Guatemala who are flying there now.

By going and serving these disciples are loving God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and
loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

The source of that service is what God does.

God gives us the good earth which provides for water and life.

God gives us neighbors to love and share.

God calls us to use our hearts, minds, souls, and strength of bodies to serve.

Jesus is the source of that grace and love.

Otherwise, the work would be overwhelming, too hard.

Long shares that a friend was telling him about taking a church youth group on a mission trip to Jamaica.

On their trip they visited one of the local elementary schools, and they spent some time observing in a classroom seriously overcrowded with children, most of them very poor, all of them needy and wiggly and noisy and unruly.

It was a difficult, sometimes even chaotic, learning environment; but the youth group marveled to see that the teacher carried herself with great calm and patience, treating all of the children with love and respect, despite the poverty and the chaos.

They decided that the only way she could do this was that she must really love being a teacher. But they were surprised to hear her say, "Oh, I don't come here every day mainly because I love teaching.

I come here every day because I love Jesus, and I see Jesus in every one of these children."ⁱⁱⁱ

She sat at Jesus' feet, learning from him and listening, first. But that listening became action and service.

You have likely never heard of Grace Thomas.

Today she is buried in the First Baptist Church, Decatur, GA graveyard.

Grace was born in the early twentieth century as the second of five children.

Her father was a streetcar conductor in Birmingham, Alabama, and so Grace grew up in modest circumstances.

Later in life after getting married and moving to Georgia, Grace took a clerking job in the state capitol in Atlanta, where she developed a fondness for politics and the law.

So, although already a full-time mother and a full-time clerk, Grace enrolled in night school to study law.

In 1954 Grace shocked her family by announcing that she wanted to run for public office. What's more, Grace didn't want to run for drain commissioner or for the city council: Grace ran for governor of the state of Georgia.

There was a total of nine candidates that year—nine candidates, one issue.

It was 1954 and the issue was *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark decision that mandated a desegregating of schools.

Grace Thomas was alone among the nine candidates to say she thought this was a just decision.

Her campaign slogan was "Say Grace at the Polls"!

Hardly anyone did, though, and Grace ran dead last.

Her family was glad she got it out of her system,

except she didn't and so decided to run for governor again in 1962.

By then the racial tensions in the South were far more taut than they had been eight years earlier.

Grace's progressive platform on race issues earned her a number of death threats.

One day she held a rally in a small Georgia town and chose as her venue the old slave market in the town square.

As she stood there, Grace motioned to the platform where once human beings had been bought and sold like a product and she said,

"The old has passed away, the new has come.

A new day has come when all Georgians, white and black, can join hands and work together."

At that point a red-faced man in the crowd interrupted Grace's speech to blurt out,

"Are you a communist!?"

"Why, no," Grace replied quietly.

"Well then, where'd you get all them galdurned ideas!?"

Grace pointed to the steeple of a nearby Baptist church. "I learned them over there, in Sunday school."ⁱⁱⁱ

Grace had spent time listening to the Word of her Lord.

Her church leaders and her parents had taught her to listen at the feet of Jesus by studying Scripture, worshiping, praying just like our Fort Hill Faith Practices listed on the front of your bulletin. In other words, they showed her what it looks like when Jesus is Lord of our lives.

What she heard changed her life and launched her on a very specific mission even if she never became governor.

It's always good to take time to listen to the Word of the Lord.

But that Word is alive, a living word—it always leads to also action!

Friends, the Word became flesh and dwelled among us in Jesus Christ.

We soak up that word until it becomes alive in and through us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I invite you to pause for a moment of silence to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church, to you and to me...

ⁱ Tom Long, "Mary and Martha," day1.org/1052-mary_and_martha

ⁱⁱ IBID

ⁱⁱⁱ Long, *Awakened to a Calling: Reflections on the Vocation of Ministry*, Melissa Wiginton and Ann Svennungsen, Ed., (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005).