

HOSPITALITY TO JESUS

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Luke 10:38-42

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Mary and Martha, we have heard the story so many times, and I'm sure you heard about the book or may even have read it, *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*, the inside flap says it is an invitation for every woman who feels she isn't godly enough...isn't loving enough...isn't doing enough. The life of a woman today isn't really all that different from that of Mary and Martha in the New Testament. Like Mary, you long to sit at the Lord's feet...but the daily demands of a busy world just won't leave you alone. Like Martha, you love Jesus and really want to serve him...yet you struggle with weariness, resentment, and feelings of inadequacy. Then comes Jesus, right into the midst of your busy Mary/Martha life-and he extends the same invitation he issued long ago to the two sisters of Bethany. Tenderly he invites you to choose "the better part"-a joyful life of "living-room" intimacy with him that flows naturally into "kitchen service" for him. How can you make that choice? 1

I hope we can answer that question today.

From all the stories we have heard about Jesus in the Bible He is either invited to houses in the towns He visits or He invites Himself like He did with Zacchaeus when He told Zacchaeus to come down out of the tree so He could dine with him. It seems hospitality is important in the world Jesus lives in just as it is now and I'm sure has always been but it can get out of hand as we see with Mary and Martha.

When Jesus comes to a village, Martha reaches out in hospitality by welcoming Jesus into the home she shares with her sister Mary. She then busies herself with the tasks of serving their guest which is called diakonian, Greek to serve, where Deacon comes from. It is something we naturally go do when we have guests; we go into the kitchen to see what we have to put together for dinner. Nowadays our kitchen is one of the most important places in our homes to gather. We try to keep our kitchens up to date with the latest gadgets and appliances so we have something for our guest to eat. That is exactly what Martha was doing, what can be so wrong with that? Martha wasn't in the same room with Jesus but she was being a servant and preparing the meal for them.

Meanwhile her sister Mary sits at Jesus' feet, listening to his words. Rather than assuming the role expected of women in her culture, she takes her place at the feet of Jesus. She

assumes the posture of a student learning at the feet of a rabbi, a role traditionally reserved for men. I believe she knew something special was going on, something she knew was important and she needed to listen. Taking time to listen is the thing we find so hard to do; we are the ones in the kitchen worrying about making the right impression, preparing food and straightening up so everything is perfect, we can be distracted by so many things.

So is Martha in our reading today, she interrupts everyone from their time of listening to Christ and starts raising her voice asks, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me” (10:40).

Many who read or hear this story may cheer for Mary in her stepping in and sitting with the men and changing the traditional role. Many may also empathize with Martha’s resentment of her sister for leaving her to do all the work. Jesus’ response to Martha seems less than sympathetic and says “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her” (10:41-42).

The problem with Martha is not that she is busy serving and providing hospitality. Certainly Jesus commends this kind of service to the neighbor many times, notably in the parable of the Good Samaritan that immediately precedes the story of Mary and Martha. The problem with Martha is not her serving, but rather that she is worried and distracted. The word translated “distracted” in verse 40, *periespato*, has the connotation of being pulled or dragged in different directions.²

Martha’s distraction and worry leave no room for the most important aspect of hospitality -- gracious attention to the guest. In fact, she breaks all the rules of hospitality by trying to embarrass her sister in front of her guest, and by asking her guest to intervene in a family dispute. She even goes so far as to accuse Jesus of not caring about her, she says “Lord, do you not care?”²

Martha’s worry and distraction prevent her from being truly present with Jesus, and cause her to drive a wedge between her sister and herself, and between Jesus and herself. She has missed out on the “one thing needed” for true hospitality. There is no greater hospitality than listening to your guest. How much more so when the guest is Jesus! So Jesus says that Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her. The one thing needed is for Martha to receive the gracious presence of Jesus, to listen to his words, to know that she is valued not for what she does or how well she does it, but for who she is as a child of God.²

Even though we have been talking about Martha and Mary today along with women of our time this story can also include men, men have a very busy life also. They find it hard to sit down, to not be distracted by the world, but they also need to take the time to be quiet and listen

to the Lord. Jesus tells us in Luke 12:25, "Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?"

It is true that much of our busyness and distraction stems from the noblest of intentions. We want to provide for our families, we want to give our children every opportunity to enrich their lives, we want to serve our neighbors, and yes, we want to serve the Lord. Indeed, where would the church be without its "Martha's," those faithful folk who perform the tasks of hospitality and service so vital to making the church a welcoming and well-functioning community?²

And yet if all our activities leave us with no time to be still in the Lord's presence and hear God's word, we are likely to end up anxious and troubled. We could end up with reaching out in service that is not showing the love of Christ in us. We are serving but not serving as the true hands and feet of Christ. We are present but Christ is not truly present in us. I know I have talked many times about how important it is to take the time to be quiet and listen for the Lord. When we let the world run our lives every day from the time we get up to the time we go to bed there is no time for the Lord. We need to make that time, as Christ tells Martha, "Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her" and we certainly don't want Christ to leave us alone with all our distractions, we want to be close to Him just like Mary.

Jesus invites all of us who are worried and distracted by many things to sit and rest in His presence, to hear His words of grace and truth, to know that we are loved and valued as children of God, to be renewed in faith and strengthened for service. There is need of only one thing: attention to our guest and when we take the time to pay attention to Christ in our lives He gives us what we need to get through our busy days and we can go serve in His name and be His true hands and feet in the world for Him.

Amen.

1. <https://www.amazon.com/Having-Mary-Heart-Martha-World/dp/1578562589>
2. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1723