

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸As they went on their way, Jesus came into a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who was sitting at the Lord's feet and was listening to his word. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with all her serving. She came over and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me."

⁴¹The Lord answered and told her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴²but one thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Needs

I.

You know the kind of people, compulsively neat and tidy. Without fail, every time something gets taken out for use, it gets put right back where it belongs. Every time a dish or a cup gets used, it goes straight into the dishwasher. Counters are given a thorough wipe, even when no vagrant crumb can be detected. Towels are hung neatly in the bathroom. The soap dispenser is full; the hand towel always seems to be completely dry.

Such people aren't really uncomfortable hosting an impromptu get-together. After all, everything is already clean and ready.

Maybe Martha was like that. "As they went on their way, Jesus came into a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home" (Luke 10:38, EHV). According to Luke, there really wasn't any prior warning to Martha that Jesus and his disciples were passing by. She opened the door, anyway, and welcomed them inside.

Even if things are *always* ready for guests, Jesus was the greatest of all houseguests. Martha wanted everything to be more than ok—she wanted things to be perfect. Every counter might already be spotless, but another swipe with the dishcloth wouldn't hurt. Every plate and cup and utensil that would be handed to Jesus had to be rubbed to a nice shine. Every dish she would serve had to be prepared with just the right spices and just the right proportions. It all had to be cooked to perfection before the guest of honor would taste it.

As much as you might relish being the host, you don't *really* want to do absolutely *everything* yourself. It's hard to take part in the conversation—you might get a snippet here and hear something totally different from the conversation over there. After all, you're circulating everywhere to make sure everyone has what they need and that things are going smoothly. After they have hosted an event, many people find themselves exhausted. "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me" (Luke 10:40, EHV). Mary lived in the home, too. It seemed logical to Martha that Mary ought to be helping with the hosting. Maybe with two of them working together, each would have a little more time to participate in the other things that were going on.

Martha's exasperated question sometimes gives us the false idea that she wasn't all that interested in listening to Jesus, while *Mary* was. That's not the case. Martha knew that Jesus was a great Rabbi. At the death of Lazarus, Martha correctly identified Jesus for who he is: "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:27, EHV). She knew that listening to Jesus was important.

"But Martha was distracted with all her serving" (Luke 10:40, EHV). All that was going on with hosting the event pulled Martha away from listening to Jesus. If you have ever hosted a gathering you understand Martha's distraction. Nothing she was doing as she bustled about was wrong—it wasn't *sin*. Martha wanted to serve Jesus in the best way she knew how.

As Martha looked around her home that day, there were many needs. Food needed to be prepared and served. Cups and glasses needed to be refilled on a regular basis. It was essential

to make sure everyone was comfortable. After the meal, leftovers needed to be cleaned up; perhaps a few other things needed to be tidied, too.

In addition to every other need, she needed to get some time to listen to Jesus, too. There were lots of needs to be taken care of.

II.

Sometimes it gets that way in a congregation, too. There are lots of needs to be taken care of. We needed to take care of the exterior of the church building and the heating system and the gym floor and so many other things. The restrooms in the original part of the building *needed* to be replaced. Besides those needs, so many yearly costs have risen so dramatically that Holy Trinity “needed” to pass a budget that isn’t completely balanced, praying that our members will see those ongoing needs to be important enough to consider again their offerings to the Lord and perhaps make adjustments.

There are lots of ongoing needs in a congregation besides offerings that support our work of the Lord in this time and place. We *need* volunteers in so many areas. You see the ushers and musicians and those who operate the screen when you attend worship services. When you can’t attend, you notice the need for the people who operate the Livestream—especially when something goes wrong. If the need to cut the grass or trim the shrubs wasn’t met by volunteers, you would probably notice.

There are so many needs around a Christian congregation that we could use a platoon of Marthas to get all the jobs done.

Your life outside the congregation is filled with needs, too. Whether you clean a little bit every day or only when guests are scheduled to come to your home, you need to clean once in a while. If you own a home or car, repairs need to be made from time to time—whether you do the repairing yourself, or hire someone else to do it. You need to shop for the things you need to eat and to wear. You need to interact with people sometimes, too. When you boil it all down to the bare essentials, you need food and clothing and shelter and water; you need air to breathe, you need to sleep, you need a functioning world to live in.

III.

When Martha expressed her “need” for Mary to help with all the chores, “The Lord answered and told her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴²but one thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part, which will not be taken away from her’” (Luke 10:41-42, EHV).

There are lots of needs to be met—things that need to be done. The things Martha saw as needs, the things we see as needs in our congregation, the things you see as needs in your life, really *are* needs. But—and here’s the great, big but—if those things are distractions, their importance disappears completely.

It is easy—maybe even common—to make the message about Jesus just one thing on a whole list of things you consider as important. Perhaps time to listen to Jesus and read about Jesus is actually not at the top of your list—all the other needs push and shove until God gets shoved to the side—and shoved out.

“Only one thing is needed.” The one thing needed isn’t oxygen to breathe or water to drink or a good night’s sleep. There is one thing that is the “better part.” What tops the list of so many needs is to hear about Jesus—to hear what he has done for all people to pay for sin.

Jesus reminds us: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16, EHV). Once you have been chosen by the Holy Spirit and have faith in your heart, you make some choices. Are you going to spend all your time in the kitchen? Are you going to spend all your time with recreation activities? Or are you going to spend time at the feet of Jesus? Choose the “better part.”

IV.

Mary and Martha were both followers of Jesus. Both heard and saw and believed the works and words of Jesus. Both were faithful believers.

James wrote: “Be people who do what the word says, not people who only hear it. Such people are deceiving themselves” (James 1:22, EHV). He followed that up in the next chapter of his letter by saying: “Faith, if it is alone and has no works, is dead” (James 2:17, EHV). What James is saying is that faith is *supposed* to have some actions associated with it. There is to be some *doing*, not just *hearing*.

Sometimes the doers get burned out. They begin to get angry because others don’t step forward to help out. For some, their very faith is threatened when they see what appears to be a lack of zeal on the part of their fellow Christians. Maybe that’s where Martha found herself that day.

Solomon wrote: “For everything there is an appointed time. There is an appropriate time for every activity under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1, EHV). Doing is great. Doing fulfills all kinds of needs. But if the doing is distracting, then it is the appointed time, the appropriate time, for listening.

The saying in the computer world for decades now has been: “garbage in, garbage out.” Information has to be entered correctly, or the answers the computer will spit out will be faulty, too. The same is true of the Christian life: there can be no godly output without godly *input*. If Christ isn’t in a person’s heart, whatever needs might *seem* to be met are not being met in a God-pleasing way. God doesn’t simply want us to do good things to fill needs, he wants to live in us and do good things *through* us.

What is it you remember most about the time you have spent with those you love? Were you really most impressed with their housekeeping and their hospitality? More than likely, what you found most important is the time you spent with those you love.

Making sure everything looks great when you are hosting only lasts for a little while unless, of course, you are one of those who is compulsively neat and tidy. For most people, once the guests leave the clutter makes its way out of the closets into its rightful place—strewn around the house.

Of all the needs, whether hosting a gathering or as a member of a church, “One thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42, EHV). One thing is needed: hearing and learning the Word of God. Without *that*, everything else is worthless. When that one thing is not simply one thing among many, but the only thing on the list, it will never be taken away from you.

Things in life are only temporary, no matter how enjoyable they might be. The difficult and troubling things are also temporary. What you need—the one thing you need—will last forever. It will never be taken away.

Say along with David in his Psalm: “One thing I ask from the LORD. This is what I seek: that I live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD, and to seek him in his temple” (Psalm 27:4, EHV). Focus on your real need. Listen to the Lord Jesus. What a great way to begin each week—to be here and to sit at the feet of Jesus, to listen to him and his Word, to receive his forgiveness and peace, to receive the banquet he has laid out for us in his Supper.

God bless our worship as we choose the better part—the one thing needed among all the needs. That will never be taken away from us. Amen.