

Sermon 7-18-2010
Luke 10:38-42

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Martha was eager and excited to have the Rabbi in her home,
At her table.

She wanted to be with him,

And to offer him a little refreshment and respite from his travels

-- a break from the searing heat outside,

some time off his feet and away from the crowds,

A special meal to nourish and revive the Rabbi.

The thought of preparing something special to eat with Jesus,

Making him feel loved and welcome and cared for,

As Jesus had done for so many others,

This thought was pleasure for Martha.

She began preparing the food with a sense of joyful anticipation,

Looking forward to sharing a meal with the One she loved.

But as she worked in the kitchen,

Sweating from the heat,

Feeling her feet grow sore,

Her joy turned to resentment.

The Rabbi's voice,

So rich and melodic,
Came drifting in from the other room.
Martha longed to know what he was saying,
To enjoy his stories and his quirky sense of humor.
Knowing that her sister, Mary,
Was just *sitting* there with him,
Basking in his warmth and having a good old time,
Began to make her blood boil.
Martha began to close some cupboard doors and bang things around
a little louder than necessary.
She muttered under her breath,
Biting things about her sister
that summoned up anger from a lifetime of sisterly rivalry and
arguments.
“Who does she think she is?”
“I always end up doing all the work.”
“Spoiled Little Brat!”
She grumbled and muttered and banged pots and pans.
She knew that they could hear her in the other room.
And it made her even more angry that they were ignoring her.
It was she, Martha, who always did all the hard work,

Who was always responsible,

Who always had to clean up after her sister.

As Martha continued with these bitter thoughts,

Her anger and resentment grew and reached the breaking point.

Now she was mad at both Mary and Jesus.

If Jesus was so insightful, why couldn't he see how irresponsible Mary was,

Or what a good, dutiful worker Martha was?

Finally, Martha stomped out of the kitchen.

“Lord, do you not **care** that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?”

Jesus' voice, as he spoke her name,

Was a tender lament.

“Martha, Martha.”

Just hearing Jesus say her name so lovingly,

As if her name was a treasured, cherished word,

Diffused her anger at him.

Of course Jesus cared about her,

more deeply than she could ever imagine.

But he was not concerned with how hard she was working.

The rebuke that followed hit home –

She had become so distracted,
So full of bitterness and anger and resentment,
That she had forgotten the original joy with which she had welcomed
Jesus into her home.

She had forgotten how much she had actually been looking forward
to preparing a delicious meal for Jesus,

And enjoying that meal with him.

She had focused on her sister,

On their petty little rivalry and old sister-fights,

And her heart and mind had been pulled away from Jesus,

From the joy of being with him,

Having him in her home,

The happy anticipation of sitting down with him at the table

And sharing a yummy meal and good conversation.

Her anger and bitterness had put wall not only between Martha and
her sister Mary,

But also between Martha and Jesus.

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Jesus' rebuke hits home for us.

We are all worried and distracted by many tasks.

We are all too busy,

Rushing to and fro in a manic, over-caffinated frenzy from thing to
thing.

It would be easy to rant on and on from the pulpit –

about how we all need to make more time for sitting quietly at Jesus' feet,

in prayer,

Listening in silence for God's voice and presence in our lives.

I imagine we **all** struggle with the issue of setting aside time for prayer and stillness and silence in the midst of our busy lives.

It doesn't help

That we live in a culture that values **Doing** and **Doing** more stuff,

Accomplishing more,

Being efficient and achieving.

We judge people's worth –

including our own worth –

by how much we get done.

The first question we ask when we meet new people, in fact, is “what do you do?”

And when we take time to just “be,”

Time to be still and silent and to rest in the presence of God,

Listening and enjoying Christ's nearness to us in our lives,

We feel selfish,

Like we are being lazy.

The story of Mary and Martha teaches us

That taking the time to STOP doing things,

To stop working on tasks and accomplishing and achieving,

Is essential for the life of discipleship.

It is not lazy.

It is not a luxurious frill to be earned -

Only enjoyed sometime after we get our work done.

The posture of discipleship that is lifted up and applauded by Jesus in this story

Is the posture of sitting, listening, and being in God's presence.

And that means defying and going against the expectations of society,

Just as much for us, today, as for a woman in ancient Israel.

However,

This is not just a story about whether to "do stuff" or whether to be in God's presence,

As if those two things are always mutually exclusive.

This is a story about mindset.

We are all really busy.

We are not going to get un-busy any time soon –

at least I know I'm not.

And many of the things we do are good things.

The idea is not that we stop doing things altogether,

Leave the demands and tasks of our lives,
And go become a monk in a cave somewhere.
In fact, even in monasteries,
Monks do not sit in the chapel and pray all day long.
Work is an important aspect of monastic life, of ANY spiritual life.
Doing stuff doesn't have to be bad.
But Why and How are we doing it?
Do we approach the daily tasks of our lives with a sense of
resentment that we are so busy,
that others seem to have such an easier time of it?
Are we constantly anxious and stressed-out about all that we have to
get done?
Are we filled with fear that we will be criticized or judged if we don't
get a lot accomplished?
Are we trying to prove that we are important,
that we "matter" because we do so many things?
Why do we pile these expectations on ourselves,
Day after day,
To get so much done and so much accomplished,
When we know it will only lead to frustration?
I think a lot of time we are driven by fear.
Fear that our lives will have no meaning, no value

Unless we are working hard to achieve things.

We fear that we are not loved, not appreciated,

Apart from what we manage to accomplish,

And this fear drives us to constant activity,

Activity filled with anxiety and worry,

that nurtures frustration and anger,

A destructive mindset that interferes with our relationship with God
and one another.

But God loves us totally and completely,

Regardless of what we do or don't get done.

So why all the worry and anxiety?

It is this mindset of fear and anxiety behind what we do,

More-so than the tasks themselves,

That comes between us and God.

Our fear gives rise judgement and anger and resentment,

And pushes out love.

It is true that we all need to spend less time and energy doing stuff.

It is true that we need time to free ourselves from the tyranny of tasks
and work,

To nurture the relationships that are important to us,

Including our relationship with God.

It is true that we need to take Sabbath rest.

It is true that we need to pray,

to be in silence and stillness,

to listen attentively for God's voice and presence in our lives.

However, it is also true that God is present with us in every aspect of our lives –

Even in the midst of the busy-ness and the many tasks of our ordinary, everyday routines.

And God can be found in the midst of all that,

If we are able to be mindful,

To be open to the loving presence of God everywhere and in everything,

Rather than closing our hearts off with worry, anxiety and fear.

How would this story of Martha and Jesus have been different

If Martha had remembered her original joy

When Jesus accepted her welcome and came into her home?

How would things have been different

if Martha had continued with her preparations for the meal with a sense of happy anticipation,

delighting in the care-filled and creative act of picking out just the right combination of herbs and spices from the shelves,

Excited about sitting down at the table with Jesus and enjoying that meal together?

How would this story have been different

if Martha had focused on Jesus' presence in her home,

The loving relationship between herself and Jesus,

Rather than on Mary and her own anger at Mary?

How would this story have been different

If Martha had trusted that Jesus loved her,

Rather than convincing herself that Jesus just didn't care about her and was not present for her?

As Jesus says to Martha,

We only need one thing,

And that is a loving relationship with Christ.

We need to nurture that relationship in the stillness of prayer,

In the silence of listening.

But if we trust in God's complete and unconditional love for us,

Way deep down in the depths of our souls,

Then we can also experience and rejoice in that relationship

in the midst of the everyday tasks of our lives,

Free from the distraction of anxiety and fear,

Free from the anger and resentment

that comes from judging ourselves and others based on what we do and don't do.