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LUKE 10: 38-42—MARTHA AND MARY

July 17, 2022

You are worried and distracted by many things. Consider the things that worry and distract you. Consider the things that occupy most of your time and energy. Is it the demands of your job? Is it paying the bills and putting food on the table? Is it your children? Taking the dog to the vet? The expectations of you as a parent, as a child, a grandparent or as a spouse? Is it illness? Is it rush hour traffic? PTA? Is it the cell phone? The emails? The constant demand to be available to everyone at any given time?? Keeping the ball rolling—keeping the household going? The constant expectation to “DO, DO, DO”.

In the gospel, Jesus told Martha these exact same words. “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things.” The analysis of the reading suggests that the only really “important thing” is to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear the Word—just like Mary did. But the pressures and stresses of our lives simply won’t allow for the contemplative time to do that—just like Martha. When can we just sit down, quietly, and do nothing? When do we make time to hear the voice of God in our frantic lives? Where does Jesus fit in to our busy schedule?

Understand that Martha and Mary lived in a country occupied by Romans. Life for these individuals was not easy. It was a struggle. Martha was just as worried and distracted in her day as you are in yours. When Jesus came to dinner, there was no Door Dash or Grub Hub to call for food delivery. There was no microwave warm the hors d’ouevres. No Publix for fresh bread. Everything had to be made from scratch—including butchering the main course. Preparation for a meal for Jesus and 14 others was a big deal. Actually, I sympathize with Martha. Imagine her brother, Lazarus invites Jesus and the disciples to dinner. She is panicked because she doesn’t know if she has enough food in the house.

Things were tight for everyone at that time. With the new taxes they had to pay, they were never sure whether or not there would be enough food for them in the house—much less a crowd. And

if the tax collector happened to see a big party at Marthas—he might assume she had a lot more than she said she did ---and raise her taxes again.

As Martha was the oldest, much of the responsibilities of the family fell to her. Lazarus pulled her in one direction and Mary pulled her in another. She was overwhelmed with demands on her. Pay the taxes, tend the garden, preserve the produce, and keep on top of everything so they wouldn't lose their home. Martha lay awake at night. Worrying and distracted about many things.

Now. Guess who's coming to dinner?? Jesus and ALL his BFFs. Martha has been working like a slave cleaning and cooking. Then, when Mary is supposed be in the kitchen to help---she just goes and sits at the feet of Jesus leaving Martha to do all the work. Mary sits at Jesus' feet—just like a man. And Jesus, shamefully, lets her. And here is where Jesus turns the world upside down. He rejects Martha's complaint to send Mary back to the kitchen and **tells Martha not to worry and be distracted by many things**,—but then he states that, “Mary has chosen the better part which will not be taken from her.” And as Martha's soup simmers---her blood boils!

It completely went against accepted female behavior of the day to allow Mary to sit with the disciples-- and it clearly showed Jesus' willingness to accept Mary as a disciple. Martha was furious. Livid. I can just see Jesus telling Martha to not worry about so many things. That Mary is doing the right thing. And Martha snapping back, “Yeah, right, Jesus. So says you, but I know better. Listen, if I sat around on my ---salvation---- all day the way she does, who would keep the house together and feed guests,----- like you, --that just drop in?”

Yes--there is spiritual conflict in this story. Traditionally, this story is used to suggest that one way of living a life of faith is better than another. Mary, supposedly, has the “better” part, sitting at the feet of Jesus rather than helping her sister in the kitchen. Many preachers extol the virtues of Mary and diminish the value of Martha. That is just so sad—and unfair. For as Dr. Fred Craddock,.... a well respected interpreter of scripture once said, “If we censure Martha too harshly, she may abandon serving altogether, and if we commend Mary too profusely, she may

sit there forever. There is a time to go and do; there is a time to listen and reflect. Knowing when and where is a matter of spiritual discernment.”

So, who do you think is doing the right thing? Mary or Martha? What do you think Jesus would SAY? My belief is that Jesus would simply say “Yes”. **We need both Mary and Martha in our world. And further--we need to BE both Mary and Martha in our world**—but it is important to know when to be Mary and when to be Martha. There needs to be a balance in order to live a full life in Christ.

But understand the conflict between these women. To me---it’s two diverse and opposing expressions of faith. I think I understand why some clerics say that Mary “chose the better part which will not be taken from her”, Because it sounds like Jesus is choosing her piety over Martha’s works—and that’s what many ministers would like to see us do. Be more spiritual and less “worldly”. But there’s no need to “choose”----to pit the two against one another in some sort of spiritual sparing match. As the wise philosopher and famed spiritual director, Albus Dumbledore, (of Harry Potter fame) said, “Differences in habit and practice is nothing... if our hearts are open to one another.”

I think professor Dumbledore knew a great truth... when the heart is open, we have room for loving and accepting others—even those with differing opinions and practices. I don’t believe Jesus was rebuking Martha for complaining about Mary. Only suggesting that she “chill” and leave Mary alone to do her thing.

They both loved Jesus---- even in their diversity of action and expression of faith. And they loved each other. **And if there’s ever been a time to embrace our sisters and brothers and respect their unique and different gifts, practices and opinions, IT IS NOW.**

I celebrate both Martha and Mary and their uniquely different perspectives on expression of faith. We do not need to choose----we need to discern. Take today--- when we come to church, we turn off the cell phones to “sit and listen” and NOT do. Yet at the same time, we must take seriously our dismissal exhortation each Sunday—to “Go in peace to Love and Serve the Lord.”

Sitting here, right now is the time for all the Marys in us to sit at Jesus feet and hear the Word, and when we leave here today, the Martha inside of us needs to get up, to go out, and to do as Christ commanded. To Love and Serve the Lord with Gladness.