

## One thing is necessary (Ps Bijoy)

### Luke 10:38-42

**“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”**

**“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”**

Hospitality is exceedingly important in the biblical world in general and in Luke’s Gospel in particular. Palestinian culture, eating together is an invitation to be a part of the family circle. It is about breaking barriers and providing protection to guests no matter the personal cost. In first-century Palestine, hospitality is about allowing the guest to share the sacredness of the family space. And the women’s role is to do all of the cooking and food preparation.

When Jesus comes to Bethany, Martha demonstrates hospitality by welcoming Jesus into the home she shares with her sister Mary. She then busies herself with the tasks of serving their guest (*diakonian*). Although we are not told precisely what those tasks are, a good guess is that she began preparing a meal.

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.

This pleasant story takes a sharp turn when Martha, distracted by her many tasks, comes to Jesus and 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).

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Many who read or hear this story may cheer for Mary in her inversion of traditional roles. 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 empathetic, chiding her for her distraction and worry, and praising Mary: "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 (Lk 10:25-37) 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.

Jesus' words to Martha may be seen as an invitation rather than a rebuke. *Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing.* 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. Choosing "the better part" doesn't mean the other parts are inferior or wrong. It simply means that at this time, in this place, and under these circumstances there is a better part to be chosen.

### **The One Thing Needed.**

In a culture of hectic schedules and the relentless pursuit of productivity, we are tempted to measure our worth by how busy we are, by how much we accomplish, or by how well we meet the expectations of others.

People of all ages proudly declare, "I am just so busy." But, with so much to fit in, the only way to catch up is to speed up. And when you speed up you miss things. Constantly rushing means you miss nearly everything. The psalmist was right in saying "in vain they rush about..." (Psalm 39:6 NIV).

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Many of us likely identify with Martha. Feeling pulled in different directions, feeling worried and distracted by many things — these seem to be common threads of life in our fast-paced world. And yet, as Jesus says in Luke 12:25, “Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” We know that worrying does no good, and that much of what we worry about is not so important in the larger scheme of things, and yet we cannot seem to quell our anxious thoughts and frantic activity.

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 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.

*Look at the life of Jesus. Nobody is ever busy as Jesus was. Jesus was active, on the move, in the midst of people, and busy teaching, healing, feeding 5000. And yet Jesus went off by himself to be alone, silent, and still; to sit, pray, and listen; to be present to his Father. What set Jesus apart was not his context but his priorities. “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest,” he said in response (Mark 6:31 NIV), and a little later that day he went up into the hills to pray alone (Mark 6:46). For Jesus, life at walking speed was not inevitable; it was a choice. What if we deliberately slowed down to catch up—with God, with each other, with ourselves?*

Luke doesn’t give much insight to the further part of the incident. We do not know what happened next — whether Mary and Martha were reconciled, whether they were all able to enjoy the meal that Martha had prepared, whether Martha was finally able to sit and give her full attention to Jesus.

We do know that 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: Which is to give attention to our guest who is also our host, our giver of life, and He demands our undivided attention, and He has abundant gifts to give.