



LAKESWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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July 20, 2025

The One Thing

Luke 10: 38-42

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I am always amazed and impressed by those of you who are great at hospitality, those of you who have a vision for what a wonderful event will look like. Those of you who can look in a pantry with random food items scattered about and you come up with the most amazing meal. I am married to someone like that. I will look in the kitchen and say, there's nothing to eat and before I know it, Sara has looked at the same things I looked at and a wonderful meal is prepared. Some of you have that gift. We have a church that does hospitality well. When the need arises for a gathering where a meal is required, we have people that make it happen. From Sunday luncheons, to Wednesday night dinners, to memorial services, we have a team of people, and you know who you are, who will transform Benz Hall from an empty room to a wonderful warm space where delicious food is enjoyed by all. It is an essential and important ministry of our church, often underappreciated, but we see you and appreciate all you do. Which brings us to today's passage. Leys read from Luke Chapter 10 verses 38-42.

*38 Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him.[a] 39 She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's[b] feet and listened to what he was saying. 40 But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, 42 but few things are needed—indeed only one.[c] Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."*

We have been following the Gospel of Luke in the lectionary readings this summer. And today we come to the story of Jesus stopping at the home of Martha and Mary where Martha is busy getting everything ready for the meal and her sister Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus. Now the reason that I spoke about the importance of hospitality is that this passage is often used to criticize Martha for being hospitable while Mary does the right thing by not helping out and sitting at Jesus feet. Martha's important work gets slammed a little at times. There can also be the subtle subtext that women should be busy in the kitchen while the men discuss the theology. That is not what is going on here.

A few weeks ago, we read of Jesus sending out the seventy ahead of him to every town where he intended to go. He instructs those whom he is sending,

*Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' <sup>6</sup> And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you;*

Jesus is literally saying accept the hospitality of those you visit. Hospitality is expected. Jesus tells those he sends to enjoy that hospitality. The passage from Genesis that Lori read for us earlier tells of Abraham and Sarah showing hospitality to the men Abraham meets. We read,

*And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, "Make ready quickly three measures<sup>[c]</sup> of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." <sup>7</sup> Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it*

Hospitality is important. In Hebrews 13:2 we read,

*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

In 1 Peter 4:9, we read,  
*Be hospitable to one another without complaining.*

In Romans 12:13, we read,  
*Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers.*

On and on throughout scripture we find instructions to be hospitable, we read stories of hospitality, and we see Jesus accepting hospitality, so I think it is fair to say that Martha did not sin by being hospitable. Yet still we hear all the time that we should be more like Mary.

To set some context this happens on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem as he is preparing to face the cross and the tomb. Luke does not say much about Martha and Mary, but we know from John chapter 11 and 12, that they live in Bethany which in those days was a short walk from Jerusalem. They had a brother named Lazurus, whom Jesus raises from the dead in John 11. We also learn in that chapter that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazurus, it seems they have an established relationship. They are friends. In Chapter 12 of John, while Martha is once more serving dinner and hosting Jesus, Mary is the one who anoints his feet with costly perfume and Jesus once more defends her from criticism. They know each other.

So, we have this scene where Jesus enters a village and is welcomed into the home of Martha. We learn that Mary sits at the feet of Jesus listening to his words. Mary essentially had invaded male space. It was the men who sit and listen and think on Jesus' teaching. Luke was saying she was a disciple, she had a place among the men. In the ancient world women would normally only enter the male space to wait on men. Now this may say a lot about Mary and who she was. I would suggest that it also says a lot about Jesus and who he was. It is a small detail, but we know Jesus breaks down

boundaries, this message of Jesus is for everyone. I think it may do Mary a disservice to see her as a great example for women, she was a more than that, this was more than female empowerment, Mary is a great example for all of us. We all should follow the example of Mary, she teaches us all, women and men, the importance of sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning.

In fact, as I looked at the Greek, I noticed that there is a word, Kai, in verse 39 which means and or also. The NRSV translation does not include that word. Others do include it. It is common in Greek for some conjunctions such as kai to be omitted in English to help a sentence make sense. But I did read one commentator who suggests it is possible that this conjunction may suggest that Mary **also** sat down at the feet of Jesus, meaning she had been helping with the hospitality and was also sitting at Jesus feet. It may be also reflect that as well as the men, Mary also sat at Jesus feet.

And Martha is busy. I have to admit, I have a lot of sympathy for Martha. She is doing what we all do. What we all would have done. If Jesus stops by, he probably has the disciples with him, I am sure he was not alone. It is possible that Martha is trying to get food ready for 13 people. You know what it is like when people are coming around. You prepare, you clean, in fact some of us probably enjoy when we are having folks over as it gives us a good reason to clean up the house. Scripture doesn't tell us if she knew Jesus was coming, but if Jesus did indeed send people out ahead of him, there is good chance she knew. So, she is not only having people over, she is having Jesus over. Look who's coming to dinner! It's God!

No wonder she is busy. Luke tells us she is distracted by her many tasks. Distracted from what? I think Luke is implying that Martha is distracted from what Mary is doing. Sitting at the feet of Jesus. Listening to Jesus. She is so busy trying to take care of Jesus that she is letting the moment pass her by. She is so busy working for Jesus, she is missing being with Jesus. The Greek word used here for distracted can mean to pull apart, to separate. Martha's work is pulling her away from Jesus.

Let me tell you, that is a hard thing to hear for many who work in the Church. It is a hard thing to hear for those who volunteer a lot of hours at the church. It is a hard thing to hear for a seminary student. I understand completely, missing being **with** Jesus, because I am doing the work of Jesus, missing being with Jesus, so that I can write a paper, read a book for class, write a sermon, prepare a youth lesson. Martha was so busy working for Jesus, that it had become a distraction from being with Jesus. It's not that she was doing anything really wrong. If working hard for Jesus is wrong, then a few people in here are in trouble. But Martha was distracted from being with Jesus.

And it is not just those who work in the church that find distractions that keep us from Jesus, we all have something that gets in the way of being with Jesus, that gets in the way of sitting at the feet of Jesus to learn.

The language that we would use when I was younger was to have a quiet time with the Lord. To find time to pray, study scripture, meditate on the things of God, even for a short time each day. That is sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Martha complains to Jesus that Mary is not helping with the work. It is hard to grasp tone when you read the words of Jesus. I read different ideas of the tone of Jesus response this week, some thought he was chastising in a firm way, but I read a gentle response. The double use of her name, Martha Martha, indicates a tenderness to me. Jesus tells Martha that she is worried about many things, but one thing is important and that is what Mary has chosen. The one thing. What is the one thing?

In Psalm 27:4, we read,  
*One thing I asked of the Lord;  
this I seek:  
to live in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life,*

*to behold the beauty of the Lord,  
and to inquire in his temple.*

In Philippians 3, Paul writes  
*but one thing I have laid hold of: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly<sup>[h]</sup> call of God in Christ Jesus.*

In all these passages, the one thing is to be in God's presence. This one thing is what David and Paul and Mary pursue. We know when Jesus is asked about the greatest commandment, he says it is to love God and to love people. I think this is a good complement to that. Surely part of loving God is to seek God's presence.

You have a lot going on, a lot to keep you busy, some maybe more than others, but whatever your schedule, remember the one thing. What kept Martha from Jesus was not her hospitality, her hospitality was amazing, what kept her from Jesus was that her hospitality became a distraction from Jesus, we all have that something that is our distraction that keeps us from Jesus, and some of those things are quite noble and sound like good excuses.

But I ask you, as I ask myself, when is your time to sit at the feet of Jesus? When is your time to speak with Jesus, to listen to Jesus, to meditate on the scriptures that tell us of Jesus? I love that Jesus says that what Mary has chosen will not be taken from her. It also shall not be taken from you.

So, I encourage you, find ways to serve the Lord, find ways to be hospitable, it is our response to love and grace we find in Jesus. But always remember the one thing. Take time be quiet, to meditate on God's word, to speak and listen to God. When we do that, our lives change, we know the ways of Jesus. When our lives change, our world changes, the Kingdom of God comes into closer focus. Be like Mary, remember the one thing.

Amen.