

July 17, 2022
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 10:38-42 (Genesis 18:1-10)

THE ONE THING NECESSARY.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 10th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

How often do you check your priorities? Or maybe a better question is, do you have any set priorities in this life? You only have so much time and energy. Life is hard. You are being pulled in so many different directions at the same time. If you don't set priorities and commit to focusing on them as the most important things in life, you will become distracted and follow the path of least resistance, wasting your time and energy on random and unimportant activities.

Even when trying to keep the important things in life important, the distractions of the world cause you to lose focus. Even among your top priorities, each one must be attended to its own time. King Solomon writes:

"! For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:"
(Ecclesiastes 3:1)

You don't plant when it's time to harvest. You don't laugh and dance when it is time to weep and mourn. (cf: Ecclesiastes 3:2–8) There is a time to work. There is a time to serve and love your neighbor. And there is a time to sit at the feet of Jesus and be served by Him.

Our Gospel text this morning is not a parable that pits two imaginary sisters against each other to teach us who is right and who is wrong. No. It is a real story about two real women: Martha and her sister Mary, and two types of hospitality: those who serve and those who receive.

Jesus has set His face to go to Jerusalem. (cf: Luke 9:51) Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. (cf: Luke 9:58) As He travels to His appointment with death on the cross, He enters a village where Martha welcomes Him into her home.

Martha's home could be your home. You know what it is like to host guests. There is work to be done. Especially if your guests arrive unannounced. You try to straighten things up. There is food to be prepared. A table to be set. Drinks and snacks. Like you, Martha devotes herself completely to the many things to properly serve Jesus.

We cannot say that what Martha is doing is in and of itself something that is wrong or bad. She is doing a good work. It is good, right, and salutary that she wishes to serve her Lord. We see a good picture of this in our Old Testament lesson. (cf: Genesis 18:1–10) The pre-Incarnate Christ and two angels appear to Abraham outside his tent. The Lord is bringing good news, that Sarah, in her old age, will bear the child that had been long promised to them. The other two individuals would later continue on their way to Sodom to pour out God’s judgment and wrath against its sinfulness.

Abraham greets the trio with hospitality and he and Sarah get to work. Water to wash the men’s feet and rest under a shade tree. Almost 20 quarts of fine flour for cakes. A tender and good calf from the herd to be prepared and served with curds and milk. Nothing but abundance and the best for the guests. And this is how Martha feels having Jesus visiting her house. Nothing but the finest and highest faithful service for her Lord. But being distracted in her service, she misses the point of why Jesus came into her home in the first place. He came not to be served but to serve. (cf: Matthew 20:28) And that is where you and I are just like Martha.

There is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. You try keep your priorities in focus, desiring to seek to serve Jesus – and love and serve your neighbor as you ought. But oftentimes you end up *serv*ing when you should be *rece*iving. Like Martha you become distracted and anxious. There is so much to do, and you only have so much time and energy to do it. In the midst of your chaos the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh deceive you so that you lose sight of what is most important on this side of heaven. They deceive you so that you redefine what it means to receive your Savior and serve your Lord.

Even though everything Martha is doing is out of love for Jesus, jealousy overwhelms her. Mary is not helping but listening to Jesus. Martha wants to listen but there is work to be done. That is the problem with the Old Adam. The sinful nature always wants to get the work done before taking time to listen to Jesus. But there’s always more work to be done. And, sure, that work is on your priority list. You have to provide for your family and help with homework and clean the house and cook the meals and mow the lawn. There is always a neighbor who needs help with something. Like Martha you become distracted and anxious with many things, pulled many different directions at the same time – your sinful nature is pulling you somewhere other than to the feet of Jesus.

Sister Mary is a humble learner, sitting at the feet of her Teacher, listening to every word. Jesus speaks, and she is all ears to what’s being said. But to Martha, it seems that Mary is selfish. In your anxiety and trouble, like Martha, you too have times when you get fed up and frustrated and complain to God, asking why, in His infinite wisdom has chosen to give you such a heavy load, and also, why are the others not doing more to pull their share of the load? Just as Jesus calls Martha to repentance, He calls you and me tenderly saying:

“[Christian, Christian], *you are anxious and troubled about many things,* ⁴² *but one thing is necessary.*” (Luke 10:41–42)

Martha and her sister Mary teach us two types of hospitality: those who serve and those who receive. It is impossible to serve God until He has first served you. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, so He does not need your praise or your worship. But He loves you and wants to

serve you in His Gospel, and in the Sacraments. Martha has either forgotten or misunderstood why Jesus had come to her house. She needed to stop doing and start listening... start receiving.

There is only one thing necessary and that is to sit at the feet of Jesus and to receive. He has not come to her home to be served but to serve. He came to teach and proclaim the Gospel, and to make known the heavenly Father, revealing His mercy and forgiveness. Quite likely, Jesus tells them what lies in store for Him in Jerusalem, His innocent suffering and death for the forgiveness of sins for all mankind, and three days later, be raised from the dead for our justification. (cf: Romans 4:25) And today, the One who suffered, died, and was raised, is seated at the right hand of the Father. Through His sacrificial work on your behalf, He has made peace between you and the Father. He is your peace and your salvation.

To receive Jesus is to believe His Word and also receive the One who sent Him. (cf: John 13:20) His Word is the one thing necessary. It is the good portion. Jesus says:

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)

He says:

“²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:24)

He says:

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31–32)

This is God’s work in Christ Jesus – for you – and He does it right here in the Divine Service. It is God’s Service to you. Your primary posture in the process is that of Mary, not Martha. You come before Him as a beggar, a poor miserable sinner in need of His Divine Service. You sit at the feet of your Savior and listen, passively receiving the blessings of God. His Word is objective. Our Lord speaks and you listen and by the power of the Holy Spirit, His Word bestows what it says: the forgiveness of all your sins, life, and salvation.

Your God given faith receives His precious gifts and then acknowledges those gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise to God the giver of all good things. Much of your anxiety and mine is not only because of your sin, the fear of death, and the devil, but because you choose the wrong portion. Now, it is true. You cannot choose Jesus. You cannot by your own reason or strength believe in Him or come to Him. While you cannot choose to do anything to save yourself... you can choose the one thing necessary... choose the good portion... to listen and receive the lifesaving Gospel of Christ Jesus, for it is the power of God for salvation. (cf: Romans 1:16)

“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17)

It is where the Holy Spirit calls you to faith, bestows upon you all His gifts, sanctifies, and keeps you in the true faith. Martin Luther once put it this way. He writes:

“A king gives you a castle. If you do not [receive] it, then it is not the king’s fault, nor is he guilty of a lie. But you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it.” (LW 40, 367).

There is a time to work. There is a time to serve and love your neighbor. And there is a time to sit at the feet of Jesus and be served by Him. He did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom – and today and every Lord’s Day, He comes to serve you right here in Divine Service... in His Word and Sacraments. This is where the King bestows upon you His Kingdom.

Choose the good portion. Choose to be where Jesus promises be among two or three are gathered together in His name. (cf: Matthew 18:20) Choose to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God’s Word. It is the good portion. It is the one thing necessary to deliver you from your anxiety and trouble of the many things that distract and pull you somewhere other than to the feet of Jesus.

When you listen to the proclaimed Word of God, whether in the Divine Service, in Bible study, in home devotions, or just when reading God’s Word, you are receiving the one thing necessary. It is the good portion, the riches and treasures of heaven, which cannot be taken away from you.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.