

Luke 10:38-42 “Don’t Just Do Something, Sit There!” 7/18/21

In the late 1970’s I moved out of my parent’s home and into an apartment in Englishtown, New Jersey - I was in my early 20’s - As I look back on those days, it seems like a miracle that I did not starve

I had a good enough job, so it was not for lack of funds to fill a shopping cart with food - But my handicap was that unless the cooking instructions were clearly printed on the box - I would not be able to make it into something that could actually be eaten

Fortunately for me, it was not too many years before I met my wife - Who replaced my ability for warming up a TV Dinner with actually being able to prepare food - And she has kept me well fed ever since

This morning, I am sure there are many here who have prepared excellent meals - And perhaps there are also a few who share my cooking skills of being able to read instructions on the back of a box

Nevertheless, all of us will have to admit that there is a lot of work involved in the preparation of the family’s meal - Even if you call Vinnie’s for a pizza - Someone still had to work to make the money to pay for that delivery

Now picture living in Biblical days - It would be a total disaster for some of us - Because there was no take out food, no instructions on the box, and not even any pizza

Can you imagine the hardships of being a cook in Biblical days? - Picture having to make a fire to be able to cook something - Or walking to the well to get some water - And maybe that well is over a mile away

How about having no refrigerator or even an ice box - Everything for your meal would need to be fresh that day or nonperishable - Window screens had not been invented yet - So also imagine all the unappreciated bugs that the kitchens must have had

Now picture at least 13 unexpected dinner guests showing up - And you have some idea of how Martha felt that day - When Jesus and His disciples arrived at her home

Luke 10:38 “Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.”¹ - This was the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, who were close friends of our Lord’s

It was located in Bethany - A little town that sat of the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives - It was only about 2 miles from Jerusalem - Jesus is recorded having stayed there several times and it was obviously a place He liked to go

John 11:5 tells us, “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” - This was the same Lazarus that Jesus brought back from the dead - In addition, this home of Martha, Lazarus, and Mary was probably where Jesus stayed during Holy Week

You probably already know that the society, in Biblical times, was very male oriented - Yet, here Luke records this place being Martha’s home - If this house had been their parents’ home - It would probably be called Lazarus’ home - So since Luke refers to it as being Martha’s, we may assume she was a widow

In Mark’s gospel, in chapter 14 verse 3 he calls this home “the house of Simon the leper” - So we have a clue of who her husband had been - And we can even guess that perhaps he that he had died of leprosy

Luke 10:39 “And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching” - Once again, we have an image very contrary to the customs of that day

While it would be common for a young man to sit at a Rabbi’s feet - And listen to his teaching - In that day, it was not a place you would expect to find a woman

¹ Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,

We have, of course, peeked ahead to the end of the story - So we know that Mary was making a very good choice - Even if she was breaking the traditions imposed upon her by her society

We may know that Mary was making a good choice - However, it did not look like a very good idea to Martha at the time - Mary was probably her best helper in that kitchen

Now, Jesus and His disciples have suddenly arrived - And Mary sits there listening to Jesus - Instead of offering to help in the kitchen

You can see it coming a mile away, can't you? - Luke 10:40 "But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

I am sure we all can understand the way Martha is feeling here - Notice that Jesus does too - He does not blast her with sharp words - But He speaks gently and kindly

"But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."²

There are many lessons in these 5 short verses - The first is almost lost on our culture - In Jesus' day, the feet of the master was a privileged spot - Yet Mary was sitting right there

Earlier in this chapter of Luke is the parable of the Good Samaritan - The last person anyone would expect to show mercy to a Jew was a Samaritan - But Jesus is never a fan of judging others by their race

Then here at the end of the chapter, we read of a woman sitting at the Master's feet, learning and worshipping - Once again, a woman in this role would have been the last person anyone in that day would expect

² Luke 10:41-42

The ancient world may have been a very male dominated place with many preconceived ideas - Nevertheless, Jesus affirms that both men and women are created in God's image - Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

As Christ's body, the Church, we too are called to reach out to those our society might look down upon - And especially to the downtrodden, the poor, and the homeless

With the trial of George Floyd's killer recently in the news, we have been hearing a lot about the Black Lives Matter movement - And anything that can be done to end racism in our society is a step in the right direction - But I fear that the focus of Black Lives Matter is too narrow

With God, it is not just Black lives that matter - Homeless lives matter - Handicapped lives matter - Illegal immigrant lives matter - Elderly lives matter - Unsaved lives matter - Police lives matter - Unborn lives matter - White lives matter - American Indian lives matter - Male and female lives matter, and so on

You get the picture - Every life matters to God - Time and time again we see Jesus affirming the sacred worth of everyone's life - No matter who they are - And as the Church, we too are called to affirm the worth and equality of all people

Our society today also has many rules - Some are written and we call them laws - Others remain unwritten - Yet as followers of Jesus we are called to follow two commands above all others - To love God and to love our neighbors

Sometimes loving God and loving others is so radically different to the way our society feels - That we must turn our backs on society's unwritten rules - And follow Jesus instead!

I just spent most of the past week at the Pinebrook Bible Conference - We had excellent speakers plus great Bible teaching and fellowship - Also good, was the afternoon of free time - Time to read, time to study, time to relax, time to escape the pressures that this world puts on all of every adult

Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things"³ - Could that be you? - I know I am a lot like Martha at times - So busy that it is hard to find time to sit at the Lord's feet and listen to Him

Sadly, when we have more to do than we have time for - Often one of the first things that gets neglected is sitting at Jesus' feet - With a busy schedule, it is far too easy to cut short our devotion time - To skip our prayer time - Or to put off reading our Bible

The cares and concerns of this world also have a way of getting you down - Even so, we must keep ourselves focused on what really matters - And today's passage is a great example of what really matters

The meal that Martha prepared for them that day is gone - It was eaten and enjoyed, but it is still long gone - Even the bodies nourished in that home that day are long gone - Their souls may be with the Lord - But the human bodies that were fed have returned to dust

Now contrast that meal with the nourishment Mary received - The eternal soul she fed is right now in heaven, worshipping God with all the believers who have gone on to be with the Lord

Meals are important, of course - Jesus and His disciples loved to eat - As do most United Methodists - And I would guess that Martha made them a great meal that day

Likewise, the Church does not run well without some Martha type personalities - They are the doers - The ones who are not afraid to get their hands dirty serving the Lord

³ Luke 10:41

While it is wonderful to have busy dedicated workers - What would the Church be like if it only had people who were too busy to spend time listening to the Lord?

It would not be long before we would drift from the Lord - Then we would have a Church that was more like a social club - Doing things, enjoying fellowship, raising funds - But not drawing closer to God, growing in our faith, or even passing the faith to the next generation

No, as the Church we are called to be Mary first - Sitting at Jesus' feet, carefully listening to His Word - Worshipping our Savior - Keeping close to Him, and keeping focused on our Lord

It is the Mary's among us who keep us in prayer - They keep us faithfully following Jesus - They keep us studying the Bible - Sitting at Jesus' feet, treasuring every word

We should be careful not to read a condemnation of Martha or of working hard into this passage - It is good when there is some of Martha, and some of Mary in each of us - We need to be busy serving God - And busy drawing closer to God by listening to Jesus

We are to keep growing in our Christian faith - Through worship, prayer, reading the Bible, confessing our sins, and fellowship with other believers - These are all important - But most important part in our relationship with God is our duty to sit at Jesus' feet and be open to His teaching

Foremost, today's Gospel passage calls us to be sure our walk with Jesus is our first priority - Dr. Harold Willmington, one of my favorite Bible teachers, says, "Worship of God should always precede work for Him. Work is good, but we must not let the good become the enemy of the best"⁴

⁴ Willmington's Guide to the Bible, © 1981, 1984 by H. L. Willmington, (Tyndale House, Wheaton, IL)