

Sermon Transcript

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This is one of those Gospel passages that makes many of us angry. Especially church people, because we usually have many jobs and tasks and we are kind of proud of the work we do. We feel a little attacked by Jesus. Why is Jesus picking on Martha? I mean, someone needs to do the cooking, right?

Well right there, I'm going to back us up, because who even said Martha is cooking? The text tells us that Martha welcomed Jesus into her home. Martha, the likely older sister, owns a home. Maybe Jesus has been invited as the guest preacher at Martha's home church. Maybe she is making food, but maybe Martha is busy setting up what is needed for worship, or planning the liturgy.

Whatever the work it is that Martha is doing, we can be pretty sure it is important by the word Luke chooses to describe it. Our translation says that Martha has many "tasks" but the Greek word used is *diakonia*, which is sometimes translated as "service." The word *diakonia* is where we get the word deacon, and is at the heart of what it means to be a disciple. Jesus says later in Luke, at the Last Supper, "I am here among you as one who serves," using that same Greek word.

Service, doing things, is pretty important to Jesus. I mean, he has an active life of service himself, going from place to place healing people, feeding people, preaching, flipping tables, basically offering his body to others not just on the cross but every day of his ministry.

Look at last week's Gospel story, with Jesus lifting up as an example the Samaritan, who is in a different camp theologically than Jesus, who doesn't pray in the correct way, but who does many active things to help the man beaten and lying in the road.

Reflecting on all this, it seems hard to believe that Jesus would be trashing Martha's work, her service, her *diakonia*, in this story.

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."

I do not think that the issue here is Martha's service, her many tasks.

Instead, Jesus is saying, I'm not getting in the middle of this argument. You invited me into your home to teach, but I did not come here to be sucked into sibling drama.

Instead, Jesus is saying, Martha, stop being so worried and distracted, stop being so anxious to impress me, and the work won't be as hard for you.

Instead, Jesus is saying, Martha, your job is important, but Mary is doing an important thing too.

Elsewhere in Luke's Gospel, Jesus says that his family, the family of his disciples, are "those who hear the word of God and do it." Those who hear the word of God and do it. Mary and Martha are actually two halves of what it means to follow Jesus.

Those who hear the word of God and do it. We disciples of today may have to be more like Mary at certain times in our life. Whether we are earlier in our faith journey like Mary, or experienced like Martha, we need our Mary time. We need to listen, to hear God's word to us. Even Jesus, with all his active ministry, with his walking and taking his body everywhere, even Jesus had times when he went away to a quiet place to pray.

It is when we do not take that time, that time to rest and pray and waste time with God, it is when we do not allow ourselves our Mary time that we can become worried and distracted like Martha. And it's the worried and distracted part that is the real problem. Now, the world presents us with a lot of work. And we think we don't have time to rest and pray. So we push on and get depleted, and our worry and distraction only gets worse. It's a vicious cycle that can easily drag us down.

Yes, there is a lot of work in this busy and broken world. There is a lot of worry and distraction. Obvious distractions like the Coldplay kiss cam scandal. There is this whole Epstein thing, which I'm not sure how to categorize. Then there are the clear sorrows. People suffering in the aftermath of floods. Reports of ICE raids in Norristown. A church in Gaza bombed. And much closer to home, our community is grieving the loss of our beloved Pat Smith.

There is so much going on that cries for our response, so much that demands our attention. And it can be hard to know where to put our efforts, and what is just going to be a distraction. When the problems seem so charged, so big, and sometimes so personal, it can be hard to know which thing to do first, which direction to turn.

It brings to mind again the story from last week's Gospel, about the man lying beaten in the road. And I'm imagining that story told in a little different way than the way we heard it last week.

A priest came along, leaving the Temple where he had been working all morning. He was going over in his mind the long list of things he needed to do that day, and he was so distracted by his need to get home and get started on his work that he barely saw the man. He crossed over to avoid the obstruction in the road because he didn't have time for the slightest delay in his plans.

Then a Levite walked the same way. Now the Levite had been doomscrolling on his phone, reading about how the Jericho road had become crime-ridden and dangerous, and he saw the man and thought, Oh no! It's even worse than what they are saying! He crossed to the other side to get as far away from the danger as possible, and tweeted a reply to the news, #beatenmanseenonJerichoroad. A Samaritan came by next, and you know what the Samaritan did, but do you know what the Samaritan had done that morning? He was coming back from spending time with relatives in Jerusalem. He had woken up, had breakfast with his family members, and prayed. He was rested and centered, and so he clearly saw the man lying there for what he was, not an obstruction in his path, not a signifier of bad news, but as a fellow human in need of help. The Samaritan got close, he was moved in his guts, and he acted. He heard the word of God to him in that moment and did what he was called to do.

St Martin's, as we serve like Martha, let us remember to also pray like Mary. Let us be informed, yes, but let us not get distracted and overwhelmed by the news. Let us take our time with God, take our time at Jesus' feet. And then let us take the refreshment we get there, let us hear what God has to tell us, and let us respond. Amen.