

July 16-18, 2022 -- Pastor Scott Oelhafen
Luke 10:38-42 Theme: **A Tale of Two Sisters**

1. **Stop being like Martha who was distracted**
2. **Start being like Mary who listened**

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ 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!" ⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one.^[1] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Dearly loved friends of the Savior Jesus,

Her name is Martha. And she's already had more influence on how Americans eat, entertain, and decorate than almost anyone else. There was a time when most people would say she was the personification of gracious living. She's produced videos, TV specials, and authored books on how to cook, clean, and even how to have a proper Christmas. She's published her own magazine: *Martha Stewart Living*, and lest you think she's out of the public eye, I even got an email from her parent company this past Friday. You could say: "Martha Stewart is the hostess with the most-est."

If we re-read Luke chapter 10, we'll learn her name was Martha – but her last name wasn't Stewart. Long before the American Martha, there was the Bible's Martha, a worthy predecessor of the happy homemaker. Scripture tells us this Martha lived in Bethany with her sister Mary and brother Lazarus. It was a quiet little village just a hop, skip, and a jump down the road from Jerusalem. And we can't help but think Mary and Martha's first century home was just as picture perfect. Two sisters. Not married. No children. No toys laying around to trip on. Nothing out of place. I think the Bible's Martha and Martha Stewart would have a lot in common: immaculate dinners, ideal table settings, the perfect hostesses.

Our Martha, the Bible's Martha, played hostess today to the greatest person who's ever walked the planet. We have a detailed record of it in Luke, chapter 10. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world stopped by her home. Can you imagine? And being the attentive hostess that she was, Martha kicked it into high gear, particularly because it was JESUS. And just look at her go. Can't you just see her push a vacuum cleaner in one hand while holding a kitchen timer in the other?

Does anyone here truly doubt Martha's desire to play hostess to Jesus? Does anyone doubt her skill set? We dare not unless we want Martha throwing a spatula at us. But, in our Bible reading, Martha is ready to launch that spatula into outer space. She's frustrated and fit-to-be-tied by all that needs to be done to present a Martha-esque luncheon fit for Jesus. So let's tune in to this **True Tale of Two Sisters**. And as we do, let's take an honest look at our own lives. Let's stop being like Martha who was distracted from the one thing needful: hearing God's Word. Instead, let's start being more like Mary who faithfully listened to that one thing needful.

My fellow party planners -- can you relate to the busyness of Martha, rushing from one commitment to the next? Luke, chapter 10 explains. ***But, Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.*** The opposite of distraction is attraction. So what attracts you? What gets your attention? I think that if Martha was here today, she'd tell you what happened to her, could happen to any of us. She had mistakenly built up a "Martha-Memorial" in her mind. A memorial is something built to admire or remember. Yet, this kind of memorial is in the category of "What NOT to do." These are just the normal things that could distract any of us from the one thing needful from clearly hearing God's saving Word. This dangerous-to-faith-list certainly could include any of the following: HOUSEHOLD responsibilities: such as dinner plans, chores, or lawn work, good old RECREATION such as travel, kids' sports activities or concerts, or maybe even PAPERWORK & ERRANDS like paying bills and home repairs. All these categories are gifts from our good and Gracious God. But, they can also be traps of the devil used to pull us away from hearing God's saving Word in a diabolic plan to either weaken or destroy our fragile Christian faith.

Household responsibilities certainly pulled Martha's mind away. Our sermon reading explains: ***But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.*** She was stressed. And she can't keep quiet about it. She's gotta let it be known. Otherwise she'll blow her top. And who has to face this exasperation of Martha? You'd think it would be sister Mary, wouldn't you? But, it's not. She blurts out: ***"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*** Oh, Martha throws a spatula all-right. She takes out her frustration on Jesus. What she was really saying is this: "Doesn't it bother YOU, LORD? Here I am slaving away preparing for a meal for you, and you're talking with my sister which is preventing her from setting the table and making the salad?" What was she EXPECTING Jesus to say? "My bad Martha. Here I am talking about the eternal kingdom of God with Mary and WOW – just look at the time. Guess I just got carried away?"

Martha was no different from Jesus' disciples. Remember in Mark, chapter 4 when they were sailing across the Sea of Galilee while Jesus was sleeping. A storm comes up so strong that it distracted the disciples. They rush up to Jesus and complain: ***Don't you care if we drown.*** Martha complains: ***Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?*** But, don't we do that too? And it can happen to the most faithful called worker, church volunteer, or MLC staff and it often goes something like this: "LORD, doesn't it bother you that I'm trying to pull my weight around here while everyone else is loafing. I mean, don't we have 2200 other members in this church who SHOULD be volunteering just like I do?" Sound familiar?

If so, then Martha's memorial has become our memorial. Her sin becomes our sin. The things that attract us in life actually can become distractions to faith. The wind and the waves distracted the disciples. It pulled them away from Jesus. And it did for this sister. We'd like to say WE'RE NOT like Martha, but the evidence says otherwise. Bills get the better of us and distract us from trusting God to provide. Health troubles distract us from trusting God to help or heal. Recreation in life gets the better of us and distracts us from time we could better use to learn more of God, serve Him or even share Him. As one of your pastors, I stand convicted with you too.

Martha was so busy serving, that she forgot something important. Jesus, gently, helps her see it: ⁴¹ **“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one.^[f] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”** Yes, Martha misunderstood what “service to God” really meant. She forgot that service to God meant, a humble servant’s mentality – truly putting the interest of all others ahead of her own.

And friends, the only way to jolt us from the distractions of this life, is to stop looking at ourselves, and start looking to the Savior Jesus. Philippians, chapter 2 reminds us: ***In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature^[a] God, ... made himself nothing by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*** Jesus defined the true essence of a servant – not to be served or make sure everyone ELSE is doing their fair share, not to get that pat on the back. A true servant serves. And Jesus did more than just demonstrate true service, He served and saved us. For all those times, I served with a selfish attitude or was lazy enough to watch others serve, Jesus made up for my sins and He made up for yours, as He served us on the cross. He paid the penalty for our sins by dying in our place and rising from the grave. And He now gives us the power to stop being like Martha who was distracted from the one thing needful and to start being more like Mary who faithfully listened

Martha thought she was serving Jesus. Yet, Jesus came to bring his gifts of salvation to her. My friends, if we ever think we are doing a service to God by simply showing up, we need God to serve us all over again.

And what is God serving? We’re told: ***Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.***⁴⁰ Yes, hearing God’s Word is the one thing needful. Only God’s Word fills that empty hole in our hearts and gives peace to our souls. It forgives, heals, and inspires. Martha was more interested in feeding Jesus’ body. But, Jesus was more interested in feeding souls with food that lasts. He told her: ***Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken from her.*** If you ever find yourself burned out in service to God or need a flame lit under you to jumpstart your faith, the solution is simple. Sit and listen to Jesus. God’s Word reminds us: ***Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.*** But, how can you hear, if you are not, well here??

So click off the screen. Lay down the bills. And stop looking at your watch. Just sit and listen. Frustrated by a sin and feeling condemned? Sit and listen to Jesus when He says: ***“... Neither do I condemn you, Go now and leave your life of sin”*** (John 8:11). Grieving the loss of someone close to you? Sit and listen. Listen to Jesus when He tell sisters Mary and Martha at the death of their brother: ***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.*** All over again, as we sit at Jesus feet, He calms. He forgives. And He gives hope as we feed on His Word and receive His supper.

Before we conclude our visit to Martha's house this day, don't be too hard on this poor woman. In John, chapter 11:5, we're told that ***Jesus loved Martha and her sister Mary***. Not once does Jesus ever discourage the good deeds she did for him. That's not the point. So let's not doubt the sincerity of the good deeds any of us do for Jesus either. But, let's take an honest look at what distracts us from Christ. So as we consider the **True Tale of Two Sisters**, let's stop being like Martha and be more like Mary, be more focused and fixated on the one thing needful. And finally, as the Bible often says: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And like Martha Stewart would say: "It's a good thing." Amen.