

6th Sunday after Pentecost
Year C
Luke 10:38-42
“The One Thing Needful”

Goal: That the hearers believe more firmly that Christ has given them the one thing needful—the forgiveness of their sins.

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

Luke 10:42, “But one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

When God speaks, stop! Listen! Receive His blessings!

You might remember that some years ago the stockbrokerage firm E.F. Hutton put out a series of advertisements designed to catch the attention of people. In various versions, two people talk with one another about their investments and advice on what to buy. Toward the end of the conversation, one of the speakers says, “Well, my broker is E.F. Hutton, and E.F. Hutton says...”

At that precise moment, all the surrounding diners or people standing around at the party or wherever they are at suddenly stop eating, stop talking, stop whatever they’re doing, and in silence everyone leans in to hear what comes next. The counsel and advice of E.F. Hutton was so valued that nothing was more important at that moment.

In a similar way, Mary believed that everything Jesus said to her was so important that it warranted “dropping everything” to hear what He had to say. And she received great blessings by paying attention to the “one thing necessary” when Jesus came to her house.

How important is it that we, too, come to know by faith the first and foremost importance of listening to the Savior’s voice. Yes, Jesus alone has the words of eternal life—heaven itself—which He gives to us freely, simply in the speaking.

(Pause) It's a story of hospitality. As Jesus has set His face towards Jerusalem" with the goal of suffering and dying for the sins of the people (Luke 9:51), this wandering missionary has been welcomed into the home of Martha and Mary. Can you possibly imagine the excitement? More than likely it was an unscheduled visit. Invitations would not have been sent out prior to His arrival. There's got to be so much to do!

Now, if you're married, you know exactly how to get your wife riled up. Tell her that you've invited someone over, and they're going to be at your home in just a matter of minutes! You can watch the steam coming up out of her head because you've done the unimaginable—invited someone else to your home that isn't up to code in cleaning standards!

Within this story of hospitality, we see two different perspectives of how Jesus is received. Martha was being distracted by all the preparations that needed to be made. It's understandable, isn't it? What an awesome event that must have been! So, like any good host or hostess, Martha set out to do the impossible—to clean and to cook at the same time to make sure that everything got done.

And then there's the other perspective—the one of Mary. Mary shows a hospitality that was quite different from that of Martha's—by sitting at the feet of Jesus. She took the position of discipleship where she was at the very place of what the Teacher was saying. Her action was not found in the busyness of cleaning and cooking, it was found in the listening of the Word that came from His mouth.

(Pause) So, who's right? Was it Martha who was being kept busy with all the preparations that were involved? Or, was it Mary who kept busy by sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to all that He had to say?

It's easy to keep busy, isn't it? Certain projects can be lying around for years when we're asked to do something that we really don't want too. All of the sudden, that project becomes your number one priority so you can say your "busy" and avoid what someone else wanted done.

It's especially easy to keep busy in the summer months on the weekends. No time for worship or Bible class today because I've got way too much to do. But what usually happens when you look back on your day? The job was more than likely accomplished with plenty of time to spare!

It's easy to condemn people for wanting to stay busy. Consider Martha: in the Eastern culture in which she lived hospitality played and still plays a very high role. Thus, Martha was, in her own way, showing her love for Christ and doing "service."

Please hear that this text is in **no way** trying to make people feel guilty "who are the Martha's" of this church. There is so much background work that takes place before worship on Sunday mornings; for the preparation for the Divine Service; for the clean-up of the church grounds and on the inside; for getting ready for your "neighborhood block event" and "Oktoberfest" just to name a few. Without these "Martha's," it would be impossible for this place to function!

The church definitely needs more Martha's. It needs more people who are willing to give of their time and energy for the events and functions that occur here on a week-to-week basis. Christians are called to service. We might say that in this service, we are just "living out our Baptism" as His royal priests.

In our text, Martha's had it that Mary wasn't helping her. She asked the Lord to tell Mary to get up and do something! Yet, Jesus redirected the words that she said. Don't be so

distracted and concerned about doing good that you neglect what is most important, namely, to sit at My feet and hear the Word of God.

It seems like an impossible dilemma. Without the Martha's of our church, how would things ever get done? Without the Mary's of our church, how would anyone ever grow in their Christian faith?

(Pause) The story goes that a young preacher, feeling insecure about what God wanted him to do, went to an older preacher for counsel. After listening, the old preacher pointed to a picture of the Luther rose on the wall. "Martin Luther designed this rose as a family crest," the old pastor said, "and in it we see a picture of God's will for our lives. On the outside is a golden ring, representing the eternal life God has in store for us. Next, we see a field of blue, which stands for heaven, where God dwells in holiness, and from where He sent His Son, Jesus Christ. The five petals of the rose remind us of the five wounds of Jesus as He died for our sins on the cross. They are white, to show us that Christ was without sin though He took our sins upon Himself. At the center of the rose is the cross. That is the center of the teaching of the Bible, the center of the Christian faith, and must be the center of all your preaching. That is what God wants you to do in the pulpit, young man: point people to the cross of Jesus."

The point of our story is rather easy isn't it—Jesus points to the one thing needful. He points to Himself and the Word that He speaks. Isaiah writes of this Word, "So is the word that goes out from My mouth: it will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (55:11)."

The Word that Jesus speaks points to the cross. This is the one thing needful that He did for us, for our salvation. He was obedient to death, even death on a cross. On that cross,

He exchanged His life completely for ours. The sinless died for the sinful. Through His passion, Jesus brings that one thing needful to us—the forgiveness of our sins. And with that forgiveness, we have life now and life forever. It is life guaranteed because His tomb was empty, and all who believe on Him, our tombs empty will one day be forever empty as well.

Jesus gives that one thing needful to us in His Word and Sacraments. In the waters of Baptism, we are brought to faith whereby we trust Him and His Word of life. In the unleavened bread and wine of Holy Communion, Jesus brings the blessings of His death and resurrection put into our bodies so that we know this needful thing—we will be raised with Him on the Last Day!

So, who's more important or who's got it right? Is it Martha, busy doing the work of the Lord, or is it Mary sitting at the Lord's feet? The answer is Yes! But, it's always a question of priorities and order. The Word, as a gift from God to us, always comes first, and the service, as a response of love for all He has done for us, always follows. Jesus is not condemning service. But service that results in a neglect of the Word is definitely to be avoided.

(Pause) Today, Jesus teaches us the one thing needful—the Word of God. As we sit in the pew and gather for Bible study Sunday after Sunday, we are sitting at the Lord's feet. Our ears are opened, and our mind is attentive to all that the Lord would so graciously give to us.

Now, our own hospitality to the Lord is by putting Him and His Word first in our lives. We faithfully receive that Word of Good News on a continual basis. And then, because of the inexpressible joy that fills our lives of all He has done for us, we can't help but to serve Him and to be "hospitable" to others around us!

Of the “many things” we do each day, how many will really have lasting value or even matter one month, one year, or one decade from now? There is “one thing” however, that is needed: the Word of God. May it be the “lamp to our feet and a light for our path” (Psalm 119:105) as we daily walk in its light and serve our Lord as a response to His abundant love shown us in Jesus Christ. Amen.