

Series C: Proper 11—Mary and Martha: Two Ladies to Follow

Seminarian Raymond Doubrava

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Two sisters we know well: Mary and Martha. And we know their story well: Martha welcomes the traveling Lord and his disciples, and she invites them into her home. She then proceeds to do all that a proper hostess would do, probably including washing their feet, cooking for them, and things like these. And Jesus teaches while all of this is going on. Mary, Martha's sister, sits at Jesus's feet and takes in all that he says. But this does not please Martha; she thinks that her sister should be helping her, so she goes to the Lord and says, "**Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me**" (Lk 10:40). "Lord," she says, "Look at all that I am doing to serve you. I wash your feet; I make your meal. I am serving you. And I am doing all of this alone. Tell my sister to help me. At least make her do some of the work." Now, don't get me wrong. We should not look down on Martha. In fact, at the end of the sermon, I'm going to exhort you to be like Martha for there is much we can learn from her by following her example.

But the other reason that you should not look down on Martha is because we all have times that we are just like her. How often do we fall into the temptation of saying, "Pastor, I am congregational president, I am head elder, I am head trustee, I head the altar guild, I am head of a board, I mow the lawn, I plant the flowers, I sing in the choir, I play bells, I help with the meals, etc. I do so much work while so many people just come to church on Sunday morning and then leave without giving an extra ounce of effort to help you and the church out in any way. You, Pastor, tell those people to help me. Tell them that they need to quit just coming to church and need to get active in helping whether they want to or not." It's human nature to see that we are doing more work than someone else and so try either get ourselves rewarded or them punished. We desire equality: everyone doing equal work, so when we see someone not pulling their own weight, we get defensive.

Now, notice how the Lord responds to Martha. He doesn't scold her for doing the work. He doesn't demean her in anyway. Instead, quite affectionately, he says to 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" (Lk 10:41–42). He says to her, "You are working hard, so hard that you have lost focus on what is most important. Martha, Martha, I am with you. I am here to be your teacher. I am thankful that you are anxious and troubled, wanting to make sure that everything goes just right. Mary has chosen to rest and take in my teaching. Neither I nor anyone else can take that away from her."

He says the same thing to us. When we become so anxious about serving him, making sure that everything goes right, that all gets done to make sure that the church runs as smoothly as possible, when we lose focus on what is most important and we become jealous of those who simply rest, in these times, our Lord says to us as he said to Martha, "My dear beloved child, thank you for all that you are doing, but one thing is necessary. I am here. I am your teacher. I am your savior. I suffered, died on the cross, rose on the third day, so that you may have the complete and absolute forgiveness of sins and life everlasting, so that you may have peace. The one thing that is necessary is that you rest in my word, in my teaching, so that you may have the strength to continue walking in this life and so that you may continue serving as you do. Those who come and rest in my teaching, they have chosen the good portion. Neither I nor anyone else can take that away from them."

And so, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, learn from Mary to rest in God's Word. He comes to you here in this place with his holy word read and proclaimed to you, so that you may have rest. He comes to you here in this place in waters of holy baptism and the words of holy absolution so that you may drop the weight of sin that bears you down and have instead rest and peace in Christ Jesus. He comes to you here in this place in the bread and wine offering to you His very body and blood to eat and to drink so that you may taste the forgiveness of the Lord, have your faith strengthened, and have peace. Matthew records Jesus saying, "**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light**" (Mt 11:28–30). We do this every Sunday when we come to church to be refreshed, but we should also do it every day. Hence why Luther says regarding the third commandment that every day should be a sabbath made holy by studying the word of God. Every day we should rest at Jesus feet by studying his word and offering up prayer and praise to him.

And, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, having rested in God's Word, follow Martha's example and be of service to the church and to your neighbor. James writes, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "**Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead**" (Jas 2:17). He is here talking to the Christian who has been forgiven and made right with God. He says, "Now that you have been set free, now that you have put on the yoke of Christ, do the works that Christ would do, serve as He would serve, love as He would love. Without this service, without these works, you should consider your faith dead, for true faith shows itself in such ways." This is why, we serve as congregational president, elder, trustee, on the altar guild, on a board, mow the lawn, plant the flowers, sing in the choir, play bells, help with the meals, etc. But what if you can't do that? There are other ways to serve as well. Through visiting the homebound, through praying for the church at large, and through many other ways, we serve God by serving our neighbor. We do all of this not because we are trying to merit favor with God, but because we have been set free by God to do so.

As many of you are aware, this is my final Sunday with you before I move up to Nebraska to take my call to be Pastor

and Zion Lutheran in Leigh and Trinity Lutheran in Howells. And I give thanks to God for the numerous 'Martha' opportunities that he provided for me while I was here: teaching Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and Adult Bible Class, serving in the choir and bell choir, playing the carillon, running our video ministry program for almost 7 full years, and now these last few years being able to proclaim the Word of God to you from this pulpit when I've been home. But all of that would have been for naught if it wasn't for all the 'Mary' moments provided for me, wasn't constantly being fed God's Word every Sunday through faithful pastors, but especially through Pastor Hoger, and home through my family. And yes, we don't know who the next pastor is that God has chosen for us, but He does. He will provide him at the proper time. Whoever it is that is chosen, my fervent prayer for you, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is that you would continue to faithfully come to church and be Marys, inwardly digesting the word of God, so that you may also faithfully serve God and one another as Marthas, with you cup overflowing in good works and love for one another.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

✠ *Soli Deo Gloria* ✠