

Jul. 21 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Amos 8:1-12 The rotten figs Psalm 52 Why boast of evil

Colossians 1:15-28 God's Image Luke 10:38-42 Martha, Mary

Sermon: Mary and (or?) Martha

This story is short and to the point and unique to Luke. All of which is a problem. First it is so short it hard to establish context. We have some literary context since Luke places it between the story of the **Good Samaritan** a story about ethical actions, and the **teaching about the Lord's prayer**, a passage about prayer. Perhaps these two two extreme behaviors that of **Mary and Martha** build a bridge between those passages. Thousands of years of pastors and commentators have taken the side of one woman or the other. A few have said, clearly Mary gets the kudos since Jesus says that she has chosen what is right. However virtually everyone explains, excuses or sides with Mary, especially in recent times, when action has taken precedence of meditation. A competitive skier I worked with had earlier been a waitress at the resort of Maria Von Trapp. She showed this note which she held dear: "Dear Jenny, to be a waitress is a wonderful calling, for it says those who wait upon the Lord shall rise up like Eagles in Isaiah. Maria Von Trapp. Notice the idea of to "wait" as in patience, becomes the action of serving.

In text, **It says that Martha opened her home.** So Martha took the initiative and gives the invite. This is consistent with our picture of Martha in John, when Lazarus dies and **she hears Jesus is coming she takes the initiative to come out to meet him.** In today's text **Martha had a sister named Mary who immediately sat right at Jesus feet.** In scripture that phrase to "sit at one's feet" means to become one's disciple, so this was rather cheeky of Mary.

Meanwhile Martha distracted by all the preparations that had to be made, was in constant motion, moving in circles, drawn everywhere, and tightly wrapped or wrapped around the axle. In one of her pirouettes she comes to a ballet stop by **Jesus and stands over him,** and looking down, gets vocal and says, "**Haven't you given even one bit of notice to what is going on here? Mary has**

abandoned me in the kitchen, command here to come and help me” Notice Martha does not talk to Mary who clearly would not have listened. Jesus then says, **“You are worried about too many things, your mind is thinking several thoughts at once, you are causing as much as an uproar as crowd gone wild. Only one thing has needed and Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her.”**

However virtually every scholar, commentator pastor and parishioner in the last 2,000 years have **tried to take it away from her**. Text variants reflect early discomfort with this passage. There is an early text variant which states, **“Only a few things are needed, indeed only one”** because they want Jesus word’s to apply to Martha’s cooking and imply that he is telling her to simplify and only cook one dish! There is another important variant in today’s passage which says, **Martha welcomed Jesus into her fellowship**, instead of home. In other words she wanted to have some face time with Jesus, once again consistent with the picture of Martha in John, **where she goes out to chat with Jesus at the funeral of Lazarus**. This variant attempts to explain the sibling rivalry at the center of this passage. Fred Craddock one of the greatest preachers of the last decade says that we will always need Martha (s) because someone needs do the work. Luke Timothy Johnson an excellent contemporary catholic scholar, says that the explanation lies in the fact that Jesus will not intervene in domestic disputes, as shown late in Luke’s gospel when someone says, **“Lord tell my brother to share his inheritance with me”, and Jesus answered “Whom made me a judge and arbitrator over you, beware of greed in all its’ forms.”** One of my favorite interpretations of this text is an early church tradition that Mary was married to Simon the Leper. I suppose the idea that she was a caregiver would excuse her lethargic behavior. I am sort of the same way. It seems strange that Jesus is harsh on Martha and seems to favor Mary. Could it be

because Mary anointed Jesus feet with ointment? That is no stranger than some of the other views of this passage. Plummer the English commentator says that it is important that working with the faith, does not degenerate into merely waiting on tables. Harsh? However that is what Luke says when in Acts, they appoint deacons because the Apostles **don't want to neglect the word of God and want to dedicate themselves to prayer.** So why do we defend Martha, why does Mary get such tough criticism? Because what Mary did was harder. What Mary did takes more focus and is more of a challenge. How often do we pray and when we pray, how often do we actually pray and listen to Jesus instead of talking to him. How often we do we sit at someone's feet and really listen to what they have to say? What Mary did was very, very difficult. That is why we recoil. It is also all grace, she is listening Jesus is doing the talking. Who was right, Mary or Martha Neither or both. Let me give you a story and you decide.

While I was in Seminary we had Jehovah's witness, Mormon Missionaries, and Church of God Isaiah outreach come and visit our house every week. My room mate and I decided that we should invite them all back on the same day so they could hash it out. When they came, as we listened we discovered that they were people just like us. So I cooked an Italian dinner for them, and my room mate hosted them and had theological discussion with them. Well they came back, week after week after week. Was it the dinner, was it the congenial conversation or the fact that they were listened to? Was it a Mary or a Martha thing or was it both? Or was it neither? Perhaps they were just tired from door to door work and needed rest. Is the key, that Mary and Martha can and must work together?

This morning I encourage all of us to think about the two sisters and what it means for us here at Trinity Presbyterian.