

## Notes from After the Sermon I'm Telling Jesus on You!

Our Scripture lesson for this past Sunday focused on the story of Mary and Martha. Who were Mary and Martha? They lived with their brother and were all apparently unmarried which would have been unusual in Jewish society – meaning that they were likely young, perhaps still in their teens. We can assume their parents were deceased as the sisters and brother lived together. Their house was at Bethany which was between Galilee, where Jesus came from, and Jerusalem, where he died. They must have been well to do as they offered Jesus and the disciples hospitality in their home. Martha was the oldest of the three and appeared to be in control of the household. We also know, from the stories about them, that they appear to be well-educated and intelligent. They apparently knew Jesus since Martha welcomed Jesus and his disciples into her home. How they knew Jesus, the Bible does not say – but Martha's invitation goes beyond the normal courtesy with which she would have greeted a stranger.

The story has several lessons for us. The one we hear most often concerns Martha and the rebuke Jesus has for her as she rushes about her duties. But it is important to note that at the time the Gospels were written the early Christians were arguing about the role of women and what they could do and could not do in the early Church. Should they be educated? Should they be allowed to speak in public? Should they be allowed to be deacons, teach, and preach?

Obviously, Jesus and the disciples did not call ahead to tell Martha they were coming. How would you like to have 13 guests show up uninvited not only for dinner but perhaps to spend the night? And maybe more than one night. But Martha invites them into her home and then gets busy. Martha takes control. She, after all, is a doer. And her younger sister, Mary, is the thinker – or, as Martha, would likely say, the day-dreamer. So, Martha gets to work – and then notices Mary is nowhere to be found. And remember, Martha is a teenager. She has attitude!

Joanna Weaver wrote a book, "Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World," in which she admits, "When I read the first part of Mary and Martha's story, I must admit I find myself cheering for Martha. I know we tend to sing Mary's praises in Bible studies. But Martha, to be honest, appeals more to my perfectionist tendencies. What a woman! She opens her home to a band of thirteen hungry men, possibly more. What a hostess! She doesn't whip up an impromptu casserole of Kraft macaroni and cheese and Ballpark franks as I've been known to do on occasion. Not her! She is the original Martha Stewart and Israel's answer to Betty Crocker. Or at least that's the way I imagine her. And Luke's story starts with Martha in her glory. After all, this is Jesus. She scraps her everyday menu of soup and bread and pulls out all her cookbooks. 'Where's Mary? Has anyone seen Mary?' she asks a servant scurrying by."

I can relate to the anger that boils up inside of Martha when she sees Mary sitting at Jesus' feet in the living room. It's simply too much. Mary is supposed to be helping her. It's not right, it's not tradition, it's not fair. So, Martha interrupts, certain that Jesus will take her side.

Now, of course, you won't find all this in the Bible. Luke dedicates only 4 verses to an event that was destined to change Martha's life forever. And yours, if you will let the truth of this passage seep into your heart.

Instead of applauding Martha, Jesus gently rebukes her, telling her Mary has chosen what is better. I find it interesting that when Jesus corrected Martha he didn't say, "Why can't you be more like your sister, Mary?" He knew Martha would never be Mary. But when the two were faced with the same choice – to work or to worship – Jesus said Mary chose the better part.

What lessons can we take from this story?

First, we all have different gifts and we should celebrate our differences. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 12:6 that we all have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. And in Ephesians 4:11, Paul says, "Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers." In the Methodist church we have ordained elders,

licensed local pastors, deacons, and laity, all working together within the church and within our community – each of us according to our gifts.

Second, timing is important. There is a time to be a Martha, to be practical and get things done. We can't spend all day, every day, walking around and just smelling the roses. But good grief, Jesus was in the house! Is that a time to worry about housework? Jesus was telling Martha that Mary made the better choice because she broke with tradition and took the time to learn from him. By the tradition of the day Martha was right and Mary was wrong. But Jesus knew his time was limited and that relationships were needed. In Matthew 18:20, Jesus says that when "two or three gather in my name, there I am with them." Coming to church is a matter of timing. We need this time together to remember who we are and what we are called to do, and when we are here our focus needs to be on our faith.

And finally, we need to recognize that as Christians we are to have a priority and a commitment. Read Luke 14:26-30. Jesus is saying that there are times when we need to make choices. Jesus calls us to put him first, to live for him and to have a relationship with him. He calls for us to set priorities like continuing the 21-day prayer challenge. The 21 days are up. Have you formed a habit of prayer yet or do you still need to work on forming the habit? Or will you say, "That's over with. I will just go back to praying when I need something."

I don't have TIME you say! That's what Martha thought. But as Jesus told Martha, "Mary has chosen the better part." What will you choose?