

Mary and Martha

The 6th Sunday after Pentecost

July 20, 2025

Luke 10:38-42

“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled by many things; but only one thing is necessary.”

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Worries and Distractions

In today’s gospel reading we are introduced to Martha, who just might be the patron saint of this 21st century. Martha was “worried and distracted by many things”. That was 2,000 years ago -- Before TVs, before cell phones, before social media. Before any of the things that distract us in our day and age, Martha was worried and distracted by many things. I can only imagine what it would be like for Martha today!

We live in a time of never-ending worries and distractions, don’t we? The **distractions** are obvious, and include the ones I just mentioned. The **worries**, though, are equally obvious. And they seem to grow all the time. And trying to distract ourselves from our worries just seems to wear us out all the more. I suppose we can **all** relate to Martha, who was worried and distracted by many things.

Pulled Apart and Re-Attached

There is a wonderful Greek word that Luke uses in this gospel reading to describe Martha’s distractions. The word is: Perispaoumai. And this word literally means “to be pulled away or to be pulled apart.” That’s what distractions do, don’t they? They pull us apart. And they pull us away from what really matters.

What really mattered for Martha was the presence of Jesus in her home. How many have that privilege? Think about how we would have to prepare for a visit from an important guest or high official. Or how we might prepare for Jesus to come to our home. What an amazing experience that would be. But Martha’s worries and distractions about cleaning the house and preparing the meal pulled her away from that amazing experience of getting to know Jesus. Distractions pull us away from what really matters, from what is truly important. And it happens to us all.

There is another word, on the other hand, that means almost the exact opposite. It means to be re-attached. And that word is: Religion. From the Latin, re-ligare, which literally means to be re-attached. Re-ligare. Re-attached. That is what religion does, at its best. It re-attaches us to what truly matters.

So, while distractions pull us away from the things that matter, religion re-attaches us to what is truly important. And, in particular, it re-attaches us to Jesus.

In Christ All Things Hold Together

Here is another way to think about that, and it is from today’s second reading from Colossians, where Paul tells us that “in Christ Jesus all things hold together.” And isn’t that a wonderful way to think about Jesus? Jesus is the glue, the adhesive that holds all things together.

There is a great illustration of this from the world of science. And it has to do with a protein molecule called laminin. Laminin is a cell adhesion molecule. Now, I am not a molecular biologist, but I am told that what that means is that laminin is like the glue of the human body – it is what holds our body together. But what is so neat about this particular protein molecule is its shape. If you go to Google Images and type in “laminin,” as I did, you get a bunch of drawings and pictures of this cell adhesion molecule. And you know what? They all have the same exact shape – the shape of the cross. (You can see a picture of it on the cover of today’s bulletin.) Diagrams and pictures taken with powerful microscopes all reveal that the molecule that holds our bodies together is in the exact shape of the cross.

Imagine that – The stuff that holds our body together is in the exact shape of the cross of our Lord. I think that is a powerful reminder to us that Christ Jesus is what holds all things together. He is what holds us to what truly matters. He is the glue that we need in times of worry and distractions.

Yes, worries and distractions pull us apart. But Jesus holds us together. His cross. His love. His grace. His mercy. These are the things that hold us together, that keep us close to him.

Sit or Serve?

But let me take the next step with this. Because for Jesus to do this, we need to give him our time and attention. When the distractions of life threaten to pull us apart, we need to re-attach ourselves to Jesus, by spending time with him in daily prayer, in regular Bible study, and weekly worship. We need to re-attach ourselves to Jesus to be re-attached to what truly matters in life.

That’s what Mary was doing in this reading – she was re-attaching herself to Jesus. She was sitting at Jesus’ feet, learning from him. Jesus tells Martha that Mary chose the better part.

But we can’t end there. Because Martha was doing something important, after all. If everyone just sat at Jesus’ feet, everyone would have gone hungry. There is a balance that is important.

Last Sunday we heard a gospel reading that takes place right before today’s story, about the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan who helped a neighbor in need. And in that story, Jesus told the lawyer who initiated the conversation that he should go and do as the Samaritan did, that he should always be ready to help his neighbor in need.

So, think about that: One week, Jesus tells someone to be like the Samaritan and “go and do,” and the next week, he tells Martha to be like Mary and “come and sit.” Sometimes, in other words, Jesus calls us to be like the Samaritan. And sometimes, he calls us to be like Mary.

So which is more important? I like how the renowned preacher Fred Craddock put it. He says:

“There is a time to go and do; there is a time to listen and reflect. Knowing which is a matter of spiritual discernment. If we were to ask Jesus which example applies to us, the Samaritan or Mary, his answer would probably be **Yes.**”

Sometimes it is important for us to go and do – to serve others, to love others, to share our faith, to do all those things that Jesus instructs us to do. But after we do these things, it is equally important to spend some quality time with Jesus – to come to worship, to spend time in daily prayer, to attend Sunday School or Bible study, to sit at Jesus’ feet and learn from him.

The Right Attitude

What Mary is doing is important, but what Martha is doing is also important. There is nothing wrong with what either is doing. But where Martha does go wrong, it would seem, is that she focuses on the doing -- so much that she starts having a negative attitude about it. She starts being pulled apart.

We might be called to serve right now, or we might be called to sit at Jesus’ feet in prayer. Both are important. But the motivation is even more important. Serving another will not be helpful at all if we do in a distracted way, or if we are resentful about doing, or feel forced to do it. That is not what God wants.

God wants us to do all things with love. Serving a dinner with love can be an act of worship; it can be a time of prayer. Or, on the other hand, it can lead to distraction and anxiety and worry and resentment. But here’s the thing: Sitting at Jesus’ feet can also be either of those things. It can be a time of prayer. But it can also be an activity that leads to distraction and worry and resentment.

To show you what I mean, let me re-tell the Mary and Martha story, with a reversal of attitudes:

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and tried to listen to what he was saying. But Mary was distracted by many things; so she said to Jesus, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left us to prepare the meal? Tell her to come and sit with us.” But the Lord answered her, “Mary, Mary, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Martha has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

You see? Mary could just as easily have been the one worried and distracted by many things, even while sitting at Jesus’ feet. And Martha could just as easily have chosen the better part, serving Jesus with joy and free from worries and distractions.

It’s not what they did; it’s the attitude that they did it with. So what matters most, then, is not whether we are sitting at Jesus’ feet or serving Jesus’ dinner. What matters is **why** we are doing what we are doing, and the attitude we have while doing it. Are we doing it free from distractions and anxieties and hidden resentments? Are we doing it out of love?

Closing

We certainly do live in a time when the worries and distractions are all around us. It is all too easy to become bitter and resentful in our world today, and to let fear and worry crowd out love and forgiveness. It is all too easy to find ourselves being dragged down by what is around us, being pulled apart by all of these things.

Today’s gospel reading is a timely reminder to us to take time each day to re-attach ourselves to what truly matters. To spend time with God in prayer, to sit at Jesus’ feet. And take time each week to be re-

attached to God through our Sunday worship. These are the things that will keep us from being worried and distracted by so many things.

But then, after we are re-attached to what matters, we are called to go and serve our neighbor in need, to go and show God's love and mercy and grace and kindness to everyone we encounter. We can help the world stay connected to what truly matters, by bringing Jesus' love to all those around us. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.