

This One Thing  
Luke 10:38-42  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost  
July 21, 2019  
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

**Luke 10:38-42 (NRSV) Jesus Visits Martha and Mary**

<sup>38</sup> Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. <sup>39</sup> She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." <sup>41</sup> But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; <sup>42</sup> there is need of only one thing.<sup>[a]</sup> Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Do you ever feel out of breath?

I was feeling out of breath!

There was the week at school.

Unknown territory, didn't know anyone or where I was going.

And before that there was preparing my pre-work, helping your lay leaders prepare for *last Sunday*, getting the house touched up and groceries for Gene and planning for Modi's "stuff" ...then traveling, doing, and getting home....in the meantime, preparing for today, our August newsletter, the bulletin and....nope: that's enough! Do you feel out of breath? I FEEL OUT OF BREATH!

Actually, it wasn't as dramatic as all that.

Really!

When we were together last, I reminded you that YOU – each of you – have the Gifts of the Spirit that enable YOU – each of YOU – to do ministry and build up the church of Christ. The clergy aren't the only ones to do that!

And last Sunday, while I was gone YOU PROVED MY POINT!

You used gifts of hospitality and compassion to welcome Kennedy from Compassion International...

You used the gift of prayer to consider the children that are available to adopt in the Compassion program.

And you cared about each other and for me from a distance.

I was bummed last week, because last week's lectionary reading was the parable of the Good Samaritan and I really wanted to preach about that. You though, didn't have to hear a sermon ABOUT the Samaritan because you were embodying the point of that story

I'm so pleased to know that YOU KNOW you can do those things *even when I'm not here!* And you allowed me to breathe.

Today, once again, God's timing of our lectionary reading, is another blessing. And it's about the "one thing."

Oh, no "Grasshopper!" We have to look closer.

Just when we think we've got things figured out; that we know the route of the path to success; that we've GOT the easy answer for A-plus-discipleship, Jesus throws a us a curve.

When I say "the story of the Good Samaritan" y'all can give me the point of the story: Go and do love in verbs like the Samaritan who sees, goes, bandages, lifts, takes, gives, pays, promises. Right? The Good Samaritan should be out of breath!

My family sometimes says to me "Sit down Mamie!"

See my great-aunt Mamie gave hospitality with a spring in her bottom. She'd barely sit before she was springing back up to get something or do something.

In today's reading, Jesus might have been visiting Mary and Mamie. I smile every time I read this story!

But that curve: just after hearing about the Samaritan and "verbing," springs-in-our-bottoms-to-KEEP-**doing** isn't what Jesus is teaching.

Just down the road, a few hours maybe from the encounter that leads to telling the Samaritan story, "doing" has become "stop and listen."

Mary and Martha are really good friends of Jesus. They know the entourage that travels with him. And Martha seems to know what it takes to prepare for a visit from them all.

We can envision her “fussin’.”

Dusting and groceries.

Chopping and baking.

Setting the table.

She might have asked Mary, “taste this,” to be sure the seasoning is right for the lamb, but so far Mary isn’t interested in helping.

By the time Martha looks into the other room, hoping to get Mary’s attention and sees that Mary is just sitting there, listening to Jesus, Martha is simmering more than the first course soup!

How many of us have heard a sermon that urges us to choose between the two sisters?

For those of us with springs in our backsides it’s tempting to defend Martha (we’re kinda like her, yes?) “If we don’t do it, it won’t get done....”

And, frankly, where would we be as a church without the Marthas? The ones who plan and budget and organize?

I can tell you I’d be short of breath if there weren’t “Marthas” who do yard sales and scrape wax off candlesticks and set up the coffee, pull the weeds, greet and vacuum!

The others of us will point out enthusiastically that we need to be like Mary and sit and listen to Jesus...and when worship or an event is over we’ll go enjoy a meal that, we might not noticed, somebody else prepared.

Believe me, our common life in the church is dependent on the activity of many.

We have prepare-ers and attend-ers.

But, Martha wants help.

Is that wrong?

She even gets Jesus involved. “Don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work Jesus? Tell her to help me.”

Sometimes I kinda wish Jesus had said, “You’re right, Martha. Let’s all come into the kitchen and help with the dishes. We’ll talk while we put things away. Many hands make light work!”

We wish.

But he didn’t.

Instead he says, “Martha, you’re worried and distracted by a lot of things.”

One Bible translation says she “is *with much serving*.”

*That* doesn’t sound bad; we’re supposed to serve, but Jesus says, “You’re distracted by **TOO** many things. There is **need** of only one thing.”

Anyone else know about distraction?

Overbooked.

Overscheduled.

OVERWHELMED!

We’re supposed to focus on ONE thing?

Some days it’s hard to remember: What’s the one thing?

What if the point of the story (too many sermons do this) is not to pit Martha and Mary against each other or to choose one of them.

That’s already distracting, when we’re to choose Jesus

What if this isn’t about choosing between two good things, like a Bible study or outreach ministries?

Not about choosing between someone OR something that God offers us, but of keeping our focus on Jesus.

Even though we didn’t hear the Good Samaritan story last week, we can recall that Jesus telling that parable is actually an answer to the lawyer who wants to test Jesus with “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus answers him.

Did you know, that except for three spots in all of the NT, that when Jesus is asked a question he answers WITH a question?

(See I learned *something* at school last week!)

So, Jesus asks the lawyer, “What’s written in the law?”

In Luke’s version, it’s the lawyer, not Jesus, who gives the summary of OT law. He covers who and how to love with his answer.

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”*

Ding, ding, ding! That’s right!

*“You have given the right answer; **do this**, and you will live.”*

And Jesus says it like it’s a simple thing; a few words that mean all-encompassing devotion and commitment, all boiled down to one little word: **“this.”**

Jesus seems have his own version of math.

When he’s asked (in Matthew,) “Which commandment is the greatest?” Jesus responds, “This one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

What’s the one thing?

‘Cause it sounds to me: “This **AND** this.”

Do this one thing: love the Lord your God completely **AND** your neighbor as yourself. No wonder math messes me up!

What’s more: the story of the Good Samaritan is about loving our neighbor with actions of going and doing.

And then Jesus visits Mary and Martha and we see Mary loving God without distraction or worry, just listening.

She is doing the **one** thing. She’s chosen Jesus and is focused on listening.

She's doing the **one** thing – going and doing but for her that's stopping and listening.

Are you confused, too? That's more than one!

How do we know which one?

How will we know when it's time to do and when to sit?

When to act and when to listen?

When will we meet Jesus? In serving a stranger? Or when we practice quiet time and prayer (which is something we're going to talk about next week)?

Do this, Jesus says, and you will live.

But, he doesn't spell it out with details.

But listen one more time of he draws Martha to him, or tries to.

See, community is important in this story, too.

Martha IS doing the right thing when she invites Jesus into her home.

But, she doesn't spend time with Jesus, or with Mary.

She gets distracted and rather than talking to Mary directly about needing help, she gets Jesus involved, "Make Mary help me" which causes conflict.

Jesus asks Martha, "Choose the ONE THING," and he brings her back into the community. He doesn't shame her or command her. He invite her and he gives her a choice.

"Come here Martha. I want to spend time with you. WILL YOU CHOOSE ME?"

By offering the choice, and if she chooses THAT ONE THING, she's gonna reduce her stress and she's gonna lower how upset she is with her sister.

The frantic Martha-spring-in-her-bottom is so distracted that she's not loving herself.

In choosing the ONE THING, Jesus, she'll see a way to love herself more...and in response, be able to love her neighbor better, too.

Dear Ones, we CAN put down the lamb chop and come closer to Jesus.  
Whatever that “lamb chop” is; whatever’s distracting us.

Now, if you’re going to argue back “If I don’t do *all of this* it won’t get done,” will you please consider that if you choose Jesus, the ONE THING, first, you’re going to be able to do *all that* so much better.

And, there’s nothing we need to do SO MUCH OF THAT WE ARE DISTRACTED, to earn God’s love, or impress God, or prove anything to God.

Remove **that** from your to-do list.

Nothing.

There is nothing you can do, and more important, NOTHING you DO NOT do to make God love you any less or any more than God already does.

And when we accept that fact: we’ll realize that God’s grace is upon us....that Jesus loves us and there’s nothing we can do about that...that Jesus is looking at us with compassion.

What if we started seeing ourselves with the same compassionate eyes?

Choose the ONE THING...

Do this ONE THING, Jesus says, and you will live.

Amen!