

## Sermon Manuscript: Luke 10:38-42

### Choose What Is Better

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9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – July 17, 2022

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*

*"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." [NIV]*

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There was a dog that slept lazily in his yard. That is until a deer wandered through the tree line. When the dog smelled him he took off on the chase, determined to catch that deer. But as he ran, a raccoon jumped out of a tree and ran right in front of the dog. The raccoon took off in the opposite direction and the dog forgot about the deer and pursued the raccoon. Just then a squirrel ran across the dog's path. So the dog changed direction once again to run down that squirrel. But just before he caught the squirrel, a gopher popped up and tore away in another direction. The dog leapt after the gopher and was about to close his jaws on him when the gopher ducked down a hole and was gone. And so the dog ran around the yard a few more times barking but completely empty-pawed. He got pulled away from his prey every time and ended up with nothing. He was easily distracted from what was really important. That's the lesson Jesus teaches Martha of old and also to us latter-day Marthas. His lesson is CHOOSE WHAT IS BETTER. Fight the challenge of the world's fussing over many things. Instead find the comfort at the Lord's feet.

### **1. Fight the Challenge of the World's Fussing**

Some time ago I was part of a conversation about conditions like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD. We were discussing why there seems to be more of it than there was in the past. One of the ideas offered was that our children are subjected to a much "noisier" world than in previous generations. They have busier schedules and their parents cram more into their schedules too. There is less calm family time than before. I don't know if this is really a factor in such disorders but I think we would all agree that the pace of life today is faster than it was in the past for many of us.

As a result we can become like the dog in my story. We live in a world that is filled with things to chase. Our lives are filled with “busy-ness.” There always seems to be more things to do and places to go than there is time in the day. The media distracts us. There’s so much to read, to watch, to listen to, to do. The cell phone rings and we have to respond. There’s always the call to get on with the next thing. We get pulled in a thousand different directions. And spiritually there can also be lots of things pulling at us. There’s a new book or project article that gives the latest way to be more godly.

Martha experienced this same kind of thing in her life. She wanted to spend time with Jesus. That’s why she invited him into her home. But during Jesus’ visit she was distracted. She was literally pulled away because there were other things on her mind. There were guests to entertain and dinner to prepare. She was overcome with “fussing.”

Fussing over things that need doing isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Martha shows us a good thing to be fussing over. The trouble was that it was the wrong time. It was good that she was moved to serve Jesus and provide for him and his disciples. Hospitality is a spiritual gift and a Christian virtue. But in this case, dinner could wait. Instead of spending time with the Savior, she was pulled away by her fussing.

Martha also shows us some problems that fussing can bring. She was so concerned about serving Jesus that she was forgetting to listen to him. She missed his word. She also was filled with some self-righteousness because she saw herself as “doing more” than Mary. She comes to Jesus and really confronts him by saying, “Doesn’t it bother you (implying that it should) that Mary isn’t helping me?” She lost patience with her sister when things weren’t being done her way. She ended up seeing the humble attention and worship Mary was giving to Jesus as something wrong and even sinful. How often hasn’t our fussing followed the same pattern?

The message that Jesus has for all of us Marthas here today is don’t let your fussing over other things crowd out the best thing – the words of Jesus. We have a fight when it comes to the fuss in our lives that pulls us away from Jesus and his word. We can get pulled away by sinful things. Our sins of thought, word and action take time and energy away from our Savior and his word. There are activities that may not be sinful in themselves but that can lead us into sin such as recreational activities we do or things we watch. And there are the useless things that fill our world. Mindless television, endless internet, the foolish pull of the smart phone, pointless pastimes. All these things can distract us from time we can be in the Lord’s word or serving him. We can even get pulled away by good things done for the Lord when they leave no time for the best thing.

I knew a woman in Oregon who was from California. She moved to Bend and joined one of the local churches. But she felt she wasn’t being a good Christian because she was involved in lots of activities at the church. She seemed to forget that the first thing is the

Word where we find the comfort of the gospel of Jesus. She mistook the idea of activity for the gift of Christ in his good news. Our culture has this idea that we are only being faithful Christians when we are hectically doing something. I think this comes from the unbelieving world that fills life with frenetic activity because they think our time in this world is all there is.

We must confess before God that we haven't used the time he gives us to listen to our Savior's words as we need to. We have let life's distractions pull us away from the comfort that Jesus offers there. We have filled our lives with worldly activities stuffing every maniacal minute as if Jesus never promised us life to come. We have often fussed over the things we do in service to the Lord as if our busy-ness is the proof of our faithfulness rather than a response to Jesus' faithful grace to us. Jesus offers us the very best thing in his gospel. He wants us to choose what is better so we will find the comfort at the Lord's feet.

## **2. Find the Comfort at the Lord's Feet**

I'm reminded of an elderly member of our congregation in Mauston. She was a businesswoman who had been a long-time inactive member. She didn't come to church and I called on her. She explained that she was busy with her business. She was in her early 80's. She said that she didn't have time for church but would start coming when she was older and had less to do.

We can learn a lot about what is truly important to us – what is best – by how we use our time. What do you spend most of your time doing? For most of us, forty plus hours a week are spent at our jobs. We need to work in order to earn a living. We need the income so we can put a roof over our heads, food on our tables and clothes on our backs. We want to provide for our families and maybe a little extra for some good things in life. We make choices to spend all this time in this way because what results is important to us.

We see this same choice of priorities in Mary and Martha. They found themselves in the same situation. Jesus had come to their house. They decided what to do with their time while he was there. Mary chose to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to his words. But if we think about it, Martha didn't really choose. Instead she was like the dog that only followed its nose wherever it led. It led her to the kitchen instead of Jesus' feet.

Jesus teaches us about how we are to use our time in this story. We all have the same amount of time each day, each week, each year. There are many choices we have to make every day about how we're going to use those hours. There is one choice, however, that is the most important. That's the choice to set aside time each day to hear the words of our Savior and the comfort that his gospel brings in them.

Let's remember the choice that Jesus made on our behalf. He made and keeps us as his highest priority. There's an interesting passage in Isaiah. The words seem to be coming from the mouth of our Savior and speak of his determination – setting his face like flint – to fulfill our salvation. But the words also speak of how eager he is to listen to and hear God's words of comfort. This shows us Jesus fulfilling for us the priority of giving time to set at Jesus' feet and hear his words. Isaiah records:

*The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. [Isaiah 50:4-7]*

Jesus' flint-like determination brings us forgiveness. It speaks comfort to us in our need for salvation, love, care and forgiveness. Christ never wavers in his love for us and he is never distracted from our care. In his Word he speaks what is better – the best. He tells us that we are forgiven for all and have an eternity of time to live for him and serve him.

The Lord comes into our homes and lives, like he did at Mary and Martha's. He brings the comfort of his Word. But that Word needs time in this world. It needs to have a premium of our time. First of all time is necessary so that the Word is heard. Make the hour of church attendance the high point of your time every week. But one hour out of the week's 168 isn't enough. Set aside as much time as possible to sit at the Savior's feet. What better use could there be for our time?

The Word also needs time to be applied in our lives. Take the time needed for prayer and understanding of Christ's Word. Don't rush through devotions so you can get to the next thing. Instead linger over what is better. The Word needs time to "soak in." Use some time during the day to meditate on the Word you've heard or read with some quiet time for reflection.

Set the necessary priorities in your life to choose what is better with the power and encouragement Christ offers here. The Lord will bless your time. You will go with assurance of God's grace and forgiveness. You will find greater contentment and peace in your life. You will be filled with greater wisdom and understanding of God's will and ways. You will go forward with the certain hope we need to pass from time in this world into eternity.

So choose what is better. Let the Lord's love for you move you to choose the best thing in this life – the comfort Christ gives in his Word as we hear it sitting eagerly at his feet. Amen.