

9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
"One Thing Needful"  
Luke 10:38-42

I want you to think this morning, about the things in your life which demand your attention & devotion. Think about the kind of attention and devotion that your work demands, or your hobbies and interests.

For those of you who are students, think about the hours you spend to going to school and doing homework.

In your families and friendships think about the time and attention you give to those relationships.

And think about the place you live, or the car you drive. Think about the time you spend cleaning, or on yardwork, or on maintenance, and repairs.

We just got back from vacation and right way there was work around the house and yard work that needed to be done. And then wouldn't you know it as I was driving to church on Thursday the "Check Engine Light" on our van went on.

So whether its our work, school, or our homes, all of these things demand our attention and devotion. But they don't demand our *ultimate* attention *unconditional* devotion. They are each important in their own way, but by themselves they don't give our lives meaning or purpose.

The reason I asked you to spend some time thinking about these important parts of your life is to highlight what lies at the heart of this morning's Gospel reading: the tension that always exists between the things that are a part of life and those which are necessary for life.

This is a tension that has always existed within the church and within each person of faith.

In fact, last Sunday's parable of the Good Samaritan, really sets the context for this tension to be played out by Mary and Martha in today's Gospel. If Martha heard the parable of the Good Samaritan and took it to heart, no wonder why she was so interested in being of service.

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan we hear the message that our neighbor is anyone in need and to be a neighbor is to show mercy. So when Martha sees Jesus, out on the road, she invites him in and offers to serve him a meal.

So Martha is doing what Jesus said to do. She has gone and "done likewise" -- receiving this hungry guest into her house. And she has started to give her attention and devotion to the task of preparing a big meal.

But then there's her sister, Mary, studying at the feet of Jesus;

listening intently as He begins to teach about the road to Jerusalem ,  
the road of suffering for the sake of the world.

"Hey," interrupts Martha, wiping her hands on her apron,  
"Jesus, how about telling this lazy sister of mine, to get in here and help?"

"Love your neighbor, go and do likewise!; right Jesus?"

"Not right now, Martha," says Jesus.  
"Come, here. I have something very important to tell you"

"What you are doing is good."  
"But right now, Mary has chosen the better part, the one thing needful."

Martha, "I'm not just passing through town on my way to Jerusalem.  
I'm on my way to Calvary, to the cross.  
One day you'll understand why it is written,"  
'A person cannot live by bread alone' (Deut. 8:3).

What Jesus is saying to Martha is important for us to hear as well.  
The fact that we find this episode in Luke just after Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem,  
reminds us that everything Jesus did, from that point on, was overshadowed by the cross.  
And this reality changes our lives as well.

Opening our door to Jesus, as Martha did, is more than just a matter of tidying up our lives a  
little bit. It's a matter of being called, just like Martha, to choose the better part, to take up  
our cross as well.

Sometimes we want to play it safe and so we get busy and distracted, by going about trying to  
do good.

But, in today's Gospel, listen to the key questions being asked of Martha.

"What does it truly mean to follow Jesus?"

"What does Jesus' journey to the cross mean for us?"

"Will Martha see that the kingdom of God has drawn near to her  
in the person of Jesus, and will she receive Him?"

Will we?

At first, Martha does receive Jesus. She welcomes him into her home.  
She is trying to do the right thing, but then becomes distracted and loses sight of  
the most important opportunity she had that day.

That's when Jesus challenged her in front of her sister.

Which is way it's easy to feel sorry for Martha.  
Her heart was in the right place, but her priorities were misplaced.  
How was she to know that Jesus valued her attention more than her cooking?

A good host or hostess, after all, has difficulty separating the two,  
and physical needs seem more immediate.  
But her mistake is a common one. And we do the same thing.  
We then to value physical comforts over spiritual needs.

There is a tendency in our culture to sacrifice relationships  
at the altar of ever escalating standards of living.

Just think what a typical family would be satisfied with 50 years ago, compared with today.  
And think about how much time people used to spend visiting with friends and neighbors 50  
years ago.

I knew a man in my first congregation in Minnesota  
who worked for a computer software company.

And when I visited with him, I could tell he was completely exhausted.  
He explained to me that the deadlines he was constantly trying to meet required him to work  
70-80 hours a week, often 7 days a week.

So let me ask you, "In your own work week,  
do you ever feel more like a human- doing than a human- being?"

And it isn't only time-consuming jobs. Even the things that entertain us like computers, and  
television often leave little time for interacting with others.

If our human connections suffer because of misplaced priorities,  
it is even more true of our relationship with God--- the one thing we really need.

The many activities with which we fill our hours leave little time for nurturing our primary  
relationship with God.

When that happens, we feel distant from God, because we have focused our attention and  
devotion on other things

But let's back up for a second. What becomes hard to sort out is when we are busy doing  
things which seem very necessary. Like Martha, we are often engaged in worthwhile jobs and  
activities.

For example, our jobs not only enable us to feed and clothe loved ones,  
they also help us contribute to societal needs. These things are obviously good.

But listen to this.

Jesus did not chide Martha for doing something wrong,  
he brought to her attention that she was not seeking the best-- the one thing needed.

We become so easily contented with the good,  
that it becomes the worst enemy of the best.

So, the choice for us, as for Martha, is usually not between good and evil,  
but between the good and the best.

We were created for intimate fellowship with God.  
Nothing else is so critical or so essential to an abundant Christian life.  
We need to be alert, especially in our faith life, so that we are not satisfied with the good,  
when the best is knocking at the door.<sup>1</sup>

You see, Martha received a gift when she opened her door that day.  
But not the gift she expected.  
Along with Mary, she was given the opportunity to be a full disciple.

We have that same opportunity today and every day.  
Listen for Jesus knocking on your door.  
Listen for Jesus who wants to draw near to you.  
He wants your attention and devotion.  
And His presence in your life will change you forever. Amen

---

<sup>1</sup>from REFLECTIONS by John M. Braaten, [Exploring the Yearly Lectionary](#)