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St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
8th Sunday after Pentecost, 2010-Year C
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Text: Luke 10: 38-42

Martha, Mary & Us

Today's story happens near the beginning of Luke's travel narrative-Jesus' final journey to the city of Jerusalem. It is good for us readers to know that in Jesus' busy ministry, there were places that he could call home and people he could call friends. In the gospels these times are few and far between and today we get to pay close attention to such a time.

It was in the village of Bethany where Jesus found a home, a place to get away from it all, with three people he had grown to love and for whom he had great affection and admiration, Martha, Mary and their brother, Lazarus. Martha seemed to be the homemaker type. She enjoyed making sure everything was in order and that everyone was taken care of. Mary, on the other hand, was the contemplative one, one who would rather meditate and muse over life's mysteries. One was busy keeping the house a home while the other was content exploring life's challenges. and the meaning of the 'good news' that Jesus often spoke of.

When Jesus decided to drop in on his friends this day, Martha wanted his visit to be as comfortable and welcoming as possible. She, no doubt, went scurrying about the house making sure things were in their proper places and proceeded to the kitchen in order to prepare a huge meal. She prided herself in keeping the Jewish tradition of lavish hospitality especially for Jesus. Martha expected Mary to do the same-to perhaps visit for only a moment but then, come and help. Instead, as time went on Mary did not come in to help Martha. Mary did not even stick her head in to see if Martha needed a hand! Finally, a sweaty Martha, with veggies in one hand and cutting knife in the other and flour everywhere came out to see what was taking Mary so long and found Mary simply sitting in the living room with Jesus! Not a care in the world and with not so much as a tiny bead of sweat. Martha may have come in once or twice and the third time was enough! "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me."

Well, Jesus responded to both Martha's request and her cry for understanding with a compassionate lesson for Martha and for today's readers of this text.

First, there is a comparison between the two types of women with different gifts and interests. No one type is better or worse than the other, simply different. There is a place for the Marthas of this world who are eager to roll up their sleeves and do what is needed, wherever it is needed. Yet there are opportunities for the Marys of the world, those who are less excited about the work that might cause one to roll up his or her sleeves and get down and dirty but prefer to contribute in other ways to the tasks that are important. There is room in the Kingdom for both-the adoration and spirituality of the Marys in the living room as well as the sweat of the Marthas in the kitchen.

Jesus took this comparison a step further, for he let it be known that those who are often busy with many things, whether in the kitchen or elsewhere, may become so distracted and anxious by the busyness and the number of things they have to juggle that they may forget the one thing that is most important to God. They just may very well forget to take the time to pause and reflect, and even pray on the act of ministry and service to others. This is important for us to hear as we live our hectic lives full of demands and expectations.

In Jesus' response to Martha there is something else to glean and that is *choice*. Martha chose to be busy with food and household preparations while Mary chose to sit as a disciple, a student, at Jesus' feet. Perhaps the real issue with Jesus is choosing what is *really* important. Is it the number of things or events one might choose to participate in, or is it more important to choose the most meaningful thing, and that is a *relationship* with God through Christ?

In Luke's story, Mary chose "the better part," for although a huge meal with several courses will fill our stomachs for several hours, it will not last. We will eventually get hungry again. Spiritual food, however, allows a person to feast for a lifetime. Our walk with God will last an eternity and there is nothing that can ever separate us from God.

What is interesting in all of this is the connection between last week's Gospel of the Good Samaritan and the story of Martha and Mary.

If you recall, the lawyer asked, “What must I *do* to inherit the kingdom of God?” Jesus answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan who went out of his way to help a man in need. At the end of the story Jesus told the lawyer to “Go and *do* likewise.” In today’s story, Martha is told that despite all she is *doing* that her sister, Mary, has “chosen the better part.”

Perhaps what is important for us to remember as **we** prepare to *do* the work, the ministry of stewardship: using our time, using our gifts and using our money amassed through tithing and donations, that we remember that *all of it, our work, is not just about the doing for the sake of doing but about the being-choosing to be in relationship with God through our efforts.*

Some of you may recall last Sunday when it was shared with you that the Vestry and I had been on retreat the day before. We spent the day in prayer and we shared our stories, not only our personal stories but our stories on how we came to be here at St. Barnabas. We listed our strengths and weaknesses but most importantly we shared our dreams and visions. In mid-August, we will invite you into that same conversation. We will ask the same question: What are *your* dreams and *your* visions as we strive to make this church a beacon within this community and this diocese. And we will invite you to come forward-the Marthas and Marys among us, to share your gifts.

*“We need hands like Martha’s to do physical work, and we need hearts like Mary’s to point us to the spiritual. We need Marthas to admonish us to be practical, and we need Marys to remind us to be faithful. We need Marthas to raise money, and we need Marys, who have also sat at the feet of Jesus, to remind us that we must raise money in ways that are consistent with what (Jesus) taught. We need Marthas who know how to work the plan and we need Marys who know how to plan the work. We need Marthas in the kitchen preparing food, and we need Marys who can teach the young what they have learned as they have sat at Jesus’ feet. We need Marthas to remind us that there is a time when we ought to stand up and speak, and we need Marys to remind us that there is also a time to hold our peace. When Marthas have done all they can, we need Marys to pray the program through to victory. Without the Marthas the dinner would not be prepared, and without the Marys we might forget whose grace makes our eating possible.”**

There is certainly a place for all of us, the Marys and the Marthas, and still others who fall somewhere between the two. But what is the most important is that we make sure we choose what is most important to God- “the better part” which lives on for all eternity, that walks with God.

Amen!

*excerpt taken from “Martha: When Faith Becomes Frustrated”, a sermon by William D. Watley.