

Wall Street United Church – July 20, 2025

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying. 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." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Our Gospel reading this morning is a wonderful little story that is found only in Luke's account. Martha and Mary are sisters, but they are just about as different as night and day, and it seems they drive each other crazy! On this particular day, Jesus comes to their home, and Martha is busy preparing the house for his arrival and cooking the evening meal. Even though there is still a lot to do when Jesus arrives, Mary sits and listens to Jesus and just lets Martha do all the work. Martha loses it! She goes and begs Jesus to make things right and tell Mary to get to work and to do her share. Instead of doing that, however, Jesus chastises Martha — and tells her that Mary has 'chosen the better part'. As you can imagine, this was very troubling to Martha. Well let's listen to her side of the story.

Martha

First of all, you need to understand this wasn't the first time that Mary's done this to me! I didn't just snap out of the blue. She always does this! She always leaves almost all the work to me. We would all starve to death if it weren't for me, and I can't even begin to imagine the slum we'd be living in!

You have no idea how much work I do! I get up at the crack of dawn, and as soon as I wake up in the morning, I start forming a list for everything that has to get

done, and then I get up and go about accomplishing everything I set out to do. There's nothing I love more than crossing things off my list!

It's not just cleaning and cooking — I'm very busy in the community too. I'm a member of the Basket-weaving Guild, the Pottery Association and the Cloth-dyers Sorority. I volunteer to help make lunch for the day labourers and I take my turn looking after the neighbour's children while their mother sells her wares at the market.

Volunteering is so important! Everyone should volunteer! I just can't understand people who don't — they are lazy and self-centered, that's the only explanation I can find. We wouldn't have so many problems in our world if more people would just pitch in and do their share.

I just get so angry sometimes that I work myself to the point of exhaustion helping others, and yet *some hardly lift a finger!* My **sister** is a perfect case in point. She is the **laziest** person I know. It takes her almost two hours to fetch water from the well! And then sometimes she doesn't even manage to get the food from the market that I've asked her to get. And do know what she tells me? She tells me she *didn't have time!* That woman couldn't focus on a task to save her life. It's painful just to watch her chop vegetables! I usually just take over and finish the job, otherwise it would never get done. She should be more purposeful and efficient in the tasks that she does, and she should just plain **do more!** I do everything, and I don't even think she appreciates it!

She does nothing and gets away with it, and do you know what? I'm fed up! She needed to be put in her place, and so that night I asked Jesus **"Tell her to help me!"** "And what does she think she's doing sitting at the feet of the Master? Does she think she's a disciple? A woman? Ha! I knew she wouldn't listen to me, but I knew that she would listen to him.

I was so sure that he too was just as annoyed with her lazy unhelpful behaviour. I mean it was just last week that he told us the story of the **Good Samaritan**. "*Go and do likewise*", he said. Go and **do!** He didn't say "Go and sit and ponder and reflect and just be"... he said **do!** His whole point was that God wants us to get up off our cushy behinds and help others. That is what our faith is about, helping to bring the kingdom of God on earth.

So I could not believe it when he told me I was too distracted by my tasks. I kid you not, he told me that *I* was **distracted**. If he wanted to see distracted, he needed only to look down at his feet, at Mary. I swear, thieves could hold us up, and while Mary was reaching to hand over the bag of coins she'd say, "Look... a bird!" Focus is not in her vocabulary.

Why did he tell *me* that *I* was distracted? That hurt. Doesn't he know hard I try to stay on course? Doesn't he know how hard I try to do more for him and to do everything better?

Yet he said *Mary* has chosen the better part. Doesn't he know how much I too would like to sit and listen? I'm tired. I'm stretched too thin. But there's just so much to do, and so many who need my help, that sometimes I don't even know where to start.

But if I'm honest, I like doing, and **I feel loved and valued by what I accomplish**. I'm getting older and more tired and I know I soon won't be able to do as much ... and what then? Will God love me less if I do less? What would I even do less of or more of?

Clearly I need to think and pray about this some more... which I will do just as soon as I weed that garden!

Mary

I get up early in the morning too. I just love to watch the sunrise! I make myself a nice cup of tea and I just ease myself into the day. This morning the sky was the most amazing combination of reds and purples ... it was breathtaking! I called Martha to come and see it, but she was already elbow deep in flour making bread ... I guess some things can't wait. It's funny how differently we see the world. We'll never see that same sunrise again, and I'm so glad I saw it. It's true — some things can't wait!

Like last week, when I went to the well. I love going to fetch water. I just love seeing who is at the well and catching up with people. I love hearing their stories and I guess they know that ... people often wait for me, to talk to me! Anne was there last week. She's having an awful time in her marriage, and she just needed to talk. We must have talked for an hour. It was so important and so good. It

meant that I didn't have time to do everything on the list that Martha had given for me to do. I knew she wouldn't understand, but the truth is that talking was more important.

Sometimes I wish I were more like Martha. She really is amazing. She's an excellent cook and seamstress. I don't know how she gets so much done, and she's not afraid of anything. Everyone is always telling her how ...

O wow! Look at the colour on that window! That is so beautiful. I wonder how I could make that colour. It would be fabulous for a **scarf**! I once made one this really pinky kind of colour, kind of like the clouds sometimes get at sunset ... it was just so alive! Everyone loved it. I could have sold that scarf for a lot of money, but I had a nudge, a thought that I should give it to Anne. Jesus knew nothing about this scarf, but it was like I heard his voice in my heart telling me that giving to her was what I needed to do. It's easy to second guess those thoughts, nudges, feelings – I don't know what the word is – but I felt compelled to give that scarf to Anne and I so easily could have missed it and dismissed it. Anne's life is just so difficult. I was a little nervous giving it to her, I don't know, what if she thought I just saw her as a charity case or something? Funny how we second guess ourselves... at least I do. I'm glad I didn't second guess that thought this time. She was in tears when I gave it to her, she was so happy... she said it made her feel seen and valued. Wow! Did that ever make my day! I felt like I was a pitcher full of God's liquid love for someone. There's nothing like that feeling.

How did I get onto that?... oh the window. I get so distracted sometimes! (That's okay though. I heard somewhere that absent minded people get more exercise!) But what *was* I talking about?

Oh yeah...Martha. Martha, Martha, Martha. You know, I worry about her sometimes. I think she works too hard. You can't tell her that though...yikes! You'd get an earful! I just think that if every once in a while, she said '**no**' to a few people and just had some more time to stop and breathe and just be ... she'd be better off. I just think she's so busy that she's missing out on life.

Like when Jesus comes over. He is so incredible. I tell everyone about him. You should hear him speak. He speaks with so much love and power. Later on I always tell Martha about what he said while she worked away. But it's not the same. You can't really spend time with Jesus through someone else.

You know, Martha is the kind of person who can change the world. She sees a problem in the community and she jumps right in. I really admire her courage and determination,

but she needs a rest. She needs a rest for her body but even more, she needs a rest for her soul. Couldn't we all use more rest of the soul? I have this feeling like she does so much, but it all ends up being thin and frazzled; and that if she stopped and spent time with Jesus, she could drink from a deep well ... and then, *Holy Moly! Watch out world!*

Believe me, spending time with Jesus lightens the heaviness and the stress and the pain. You're left with an amazing peace, and a power to be a river of God's justice and healing love in this world of need.

Hmmm.... Oops! I've lost track of time again. Now let's see ... what did Martha want me to pick up? Eggs, oil, and some cumin and some dates. I do hope Leah is selling cumin today. She tells the greatest stories!

The truth is, neither sister is better than the other. Jesus loved them both so very much.

The fact that Jesus allowed a woman to sit and learn the way that men would learn is very telling of Jesus' respect for women. Rabbis did not allow women to "sit at their feet" which basically means to be a disciple. And Jesus didn't just allow it — he commended it. Clearly, women were not here just to serve men in Jesus' eyes. It is clear that Jesus valued the women around him, and was even dependent on them to fund his ministry as Luke 8:1-2 tells us. But none of the work we do for the sake of the kingdom is going to be very good if it isn't rooted in a transforming relationship with Jesus. That what empowers our call and puts wind in our sails, and helps us to truly focus on what we were uniquely created to do, instead of trying to do it all.

Those of you who recognize Martha in yourselves — just remember, as Pope John Paul II said: ***"Be careful of spending all your time doing the work of the Lord and forgetting the Lord of the work"***. God does need Martha's! He needs people to be his hands and his feet — but you can't do that well unless you spend time at his

feet. You need to carve out quiet spaces and time for prayer in your day, every day. I guarantee your actions will be better and more purposeful if you've spent time with the Lord.

Those of you who associate with Mary more, remember that as James says: ***"Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."*** (James 2:17) It's all about balance and it's about getting out of your comfort zone and saying to God, "I want to know you more" or "I want to serve you more". You know if a pond only receives water and never gives it out it becomes brackish – it dies. We don't sit at the Master's feet so that we can hoard those words. If you like to drink deeply of the Spirit, remember to share and shine, even if that takes you out of your comfort zone! The Lord gives you wisdom and fills you with love so that you can share it with a world that is starving for the good news of God's abundant love for all.

In closing I want to leave you with words of wisdom from three sages: first from Immanuel Kant: "To be is to do", from Jean-Paul Sartre: "To do is to be", and finally from Frank Sinatra: ***"Do be do be do!"*** Thanks be to God!

Amen