

Luke 10:38-42  
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
July 20, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

*But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As soon as Jesus said to us last week, "You go and do likewise" (that was last week's text, the teaching that results from the parable of the Good Samaritan), we sinners tend to throw all our self-righteous hope into that command. Old Adam tends to live on a pendulum, swinging from one extreme to the other: if the one extreme is the lawyer's self-justifying argument that 'neighbor' is so hard to define, he shouldn't have to worry about doing good, the other extreme (as the pendulum swings) is Old Adam's self-justifying effort to do so much good that God must surely notice and be pleased with him.

So, when we hear the command that ended last week's text, "You go and do...", we hear it in a vacuum, take it out of context, and only focus on the doing. But, of course, Jesus' teaching is for daily life, not a vacuum. And, in daily life, there's a time to stop 'doing' and simply sit at the feet of Jesus. There's a time to admit with our whole body, and not just with our theology, that we utterly depend upon the Word of God.

To that end, we hear the dialogue between Martha and Jesus, and we know immediately who is to be mimicked: “Be Mary; don’t be Martha.” (That’s how a lot of sermons end up sounding.) But, to reduce it to *that* reduces it to a moral lesson, the byproduct of which is to *still* attempt to fill the command (albeit somewhat passively), “You go and do... Go and be Mary!”

If we are to hear this text rightly, we cannot end by focusing on Mary, but by focusing on the Word. That’s where Jesus brings the attention, isn’t it? And what is the Word of Christ: “Mary has chosen the good portion, and *it* will not be taken from her.”

*It... the good portion... the Word.* As the Introit refrain sets the theme of our meditation, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

But, meditate upon that *properly*. What does that mean? Does it simply mean that my feet are walking my path unto my justification, and Jesus’ light helps me get myself to heaven? Or, as the other psalm verses of the Introit confess, does it mean the lamp and light that illuminate my life are the promises of God and the holy will of His commandments and statutes... and the beauty of the Law and Gospel bring light and meaning to the darkness and meaninglessness of my life?

Otherwise asked, what does it mean when Jesus elsewhere says, “I am the **Way**, the Truth, the Life.” What do you think Mary heard that day when Jesus, the Way, spoke to her as the lamp and

light for her life's feet and path? Do you think she heard a bunch of moralistic rules of what it means to be a Christian, so that the Bible ends up being a how-to manual, a self-help book? Did she hear that this world could be a really happy place if she just followed herself or the promises of the world, but since she was following Him who is the Way, this life would be miserable and void of all joy... and she would just have to 'suck it up' and deal with it?

*Or*, might she have heard that she was – there, that very hour – being visited by the incarnate God (joy of all joys!), so that she hung on his every word.

Isn't that the connection with the Old Testament reading?: the visitation of the Lord... and the authoritative promise of His Word. For Sarah (in our Old Testament reading), the promise was that a son would be conceived. For Mary (and for all who hear the Word in faith), what was the promise? What was the good portion that would not be taken from Mary? Was it not a promise that a son far greater than Sarah's had actually come into the world – conceived by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary – and now was speaking to *this* Mary... was speaking to her the very heart and will and wisdom and comfort of God. What greater portion can there be than having a portion with, sharing with, communicating with the incarnate God?

Dig a bit deeper and consider that word "portion." From the Greek *meris*... it's the same Greek word we find in Colossians 1,

where Paul thanks God for the Colossians' *share* in the inheritance of the saints. But, what's the *alternative* to this portion? Paul uses the same word, *meris*, in his letter to the Corinthians, contrasting 'a share with the Lord' with 'a share with demons.' He rhetorically asks, "What *share* has Christ with Belial? Or a believer with an unbeliever?"

Make no mistake: That is what is on the line in our text. Martha, well-intended Martha, had set her heart on other things, was anxious and worried about how she would address, solve, complete, conquer those other things. And, as the Large Catechism explains of the First Commandment, "Whatever you set your heart on is truly your god."

In other words, this is no text to illustrate mere 'morally-required listening.' It is the response (if you will, the counter-weight) to last week's text about *love of neighbor*... recall, that was a text in which the expert of the law had totally overlooked the primacy of the First Commandment (faith in God) and assumed *love of neighbor* was the standard by which he would be justified.

In a similar way, Martha worried that her love of neighbor – her hospitality – would please her visitor. She cherished what she could do for Christ more than what Christ could do for her... or, at least, she gave her efforts a higher priority. *She* had become her own justifier, and her judgment was based on her works. Rather than realizing her justifier, the incarnate God, was with her... and when

Christ visits you, the question isn't simply whether you pass up the opportunity for his visit (Third Commandment), but also whether you recognize that, if God visits, to have a share... the share He promises, the share He freely gives... to have a share with the incarnate God is the faithful's joy and contentment. It is the heart of all true worship. Your incarnate God visiting you is the heart of this hour.

Now, that doesn't mean that Martha should be condemned and discarded. That's not how Jesus answers her. He's gentle and patient. But, notice, he also doesn't answer her by even *acknowledging* how much she had done or tried to do. He doesn't say, "Oh, thank you so much, Martha, for putting this effort in, but it's really not necessary." He doesn't even *acknowledge it* ... it didn't matter one in that moment. In fact, it was only evidence of her anxious heart.

Rather, Jesus pointed Martha to stop and consider her sister... *not* to consider the supposedly greater virtue of her sister, but to consider the treasure her sister had a share in. 'Martha, this could be your share, too! What possibly can eclipse the treasure that is a share with the incarnate God?'

That's a good question for us, too, isn't it? We can pat ourselves on the back for being here this morning and say, "Pastor, you're preaching to the choir!" Or, we can recognize that none of us can ever cherish perfectly what it means that in this house, in this hour He so regularly gifts us, we have a share with the incarnate

God! – “Mary has chosen the good portion, *and it will not be taken from her!*” Comforting! So ‘good’ – so holy and perfect and glorious and gracious is it – that Jesus himself promises to protect it on Mary’s behalf and defend her from having that share threatened or replaced.

And what was that share Mary had? What did the incarnate God say to her? Luke’s account says only that Mary “listened to his teaching,” and the evangelist leaves us to imagine what that teaching was. Perhaps – in a moment – Jesus scanned Mary’s heart and said whatever was needed to gently remind her he knew the depths of her sin, but that – as she was one created and loved by God – the Christ sent, as promised to Abraham, would do all things necessary to rescue her from her sin. He would go to the cross for her and lay down his life for her, just as all the Old Testament foreshadowings that she knew, all the Old Testament traditions she kept, had promised and taught and pointed to. And, she perhaps heard her incarnate Lord explain that, once he paid for her sins with his sacrificial death, he would take up his life again in the resurrection and that his resurrection would be the flesh-and-blood firstfruits that promised Mary’s own resurrection.

And, perhaps he explained to her that He would send forth His chosen twelve – men she probably would come to know pretty plainly and unflatteringly as mere fishermen, a tax collector thrown in. She would hear they had fled him and denied him at the most

important hour – and yet he would forgive them and send them to the corners of the earth proclaiming the Gospel of His righteous substitution and sacrificial death for all mankind.

And perhaps he explained to Mary that through their Word – those apostles being messengers of *His* Word – He would preach repentance and work the forgiveness of sins for His Church in a sacramental life of His Word attached to earthly means, that we may forever know where the ascended Lord Jesus can be found... the same incarnate Christ visiting the holy houses of his beloved.

And, Mary, if that Jesus is the light of the world that lights your path, then you may love his holy will for his creation and may live daily life in that holy will, serving your neighbor in Christian love – not with troubled anxiety like your sister, Martha, but in joyful certainty that your life – soul *and body* – is eternally safe with Christ Jesus.

In short, friends, it's pretty likely that Mary heard that day (when visited by the incarnate Lord) exactly what you hear each holy day when you are visited by the incarnate Lord. And all too often, we take for granted that good portion, because it fills our ears so regularly... because He is so gracious to us.

Yet, this is true worship – to receive and take to heart the Word of God, his holy will and precious promises... to receive and share with, have a share in, the incarnate God.

Notice, the heart of worship is *not* to be lovers of and anxious about earthly matters, nor to be busy-bodies for God. That doesn't meant serving neighbor doesn't have its *very* proper place in daily life, as the apostle says, "Offer your bodies up as a living sacrifice, which is your spiritual worship." Indeed, the vast majority of daily life ought feel like one big holy exercise to love your neighbor. But, Martha's efforts were just as out-of-context of that as the lawyer's effort to justify his great love. And, her anxiety and worry over many things, her effort to serve rather than be served by Christ turned everything on its head, for "the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve," He says... and to lay down his life as a ransom for many (which Jesus probably told Mary as her sister worked!)

So, the heart of worship is not to be busy-bodies for God; but neither is true worship merely to claim listening-credit for hearing His Word or being in attendance on a Sunday morning. Rather, true worship is to lay aside every false god that tempts us, every earthly idol... to lay it aside precisely by sitting at the feet of Jesus – bringing *to him* every earthly load, laying at his feet every earthly anxiety, repenting of every sin... and cherishing that Christ has promised to be in this house precisely that you may come sit at his feet, cherish His Word and receive the sacramental promises His Word speaks into existence each Sunday.



That is your share, your portion, in the things of God. And for 2000 years Jesus has defended and preserved and safeguarded the treasure of that portion... and He will continue to do so until He comes again, just as He on another historic day would promise this same troubled Martha and her calm sister, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me... though he die, yet shall he live."... and that portion, that share in Christ's resurrection, will not be taken from you.

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

Rev. Mark C. Bestul  
Calvary Lutheran Church  
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