

Pastor Sailer's Page

Vol. 17, No. 8

Faith Lutheran Church
Sioux Falls, SD

March 7 & 8, 2015

ARE YOU A MARY OR A MARTHA?

At Marie Grieger's funeral on February 17, I spoke about how she – and we – can resemble both Mary and Martha, friends of Jesus we find in the pages of the New Testament. This "Page" is an adaptation of that funeral sermon.

In hearing the story of Mary and Martha, we see ourselves. We can see us in them and them in us. Here's the first part of their story in Luke 10, verses 38 – 42:

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered him, "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 from her."

The emotions ran deep and wide that day. The occasion? Jesus had come to visit. It seems to have been an unannounced visit, or, if they knew He was coming, maybe Jesus had arrived far earlier than they thought He would. But Jesus arrives, and things happen quickly. Martha, always the busy-bee, goes to work. There is bread dough to put in the oven. A bed to prepare. *And, Mary, could you please go get Jesus and the guys some water? Sister, I know we haven't seen Him for a while, but don't just sit there! Do something!*

But Mary, always the dreamer, the one who so yearned for the coming of the Christ, couldn't wait to hear what Jesus and the disciples had been up to lately. And so she chats with Jesus: How are things up in Galilee, Jesus? How's your mother? I heard you helped a boy with an unclean spirit. Wasn't that just

last week, Lord? ... *Martha, yes, I hear you. I'll help out, but could you give me a minute to get caught up with our friend. Yes, I'll go get us all some water. ...* OK, sorry, Lord, where were we? (or so it might have gone with Mary).

Martha is beside herself. She interrupts the conversation Jesus and Mary are having. Jesus returns to her a loving rebuke: *"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 from her"* (Lk 10:41-42).

I've seen myself as Martha, and you have seen yourself as her, too – in the general busy-ness of life. In the case of Marie, in the funeral sermon, I mentioned her life as a busy Home Ec teacher, the wife, mother, grandma, the Mary Kay lady, the quilter, the banner maker, the jello queen. (Somebody's gotta make thejello!)

I hope we've seen ourselves as the other sister, Mary, too – in our devotion to the Lord, to hearing from Him in His Word, to studying that Word with others.

That's the way life is, isn't it! So many things to do. It's a "Martha" world. Details. Deadlines. Demands. Do this, do that. So much of life has to do with responsibilities – as God's people we sometimes call them our Christian vocations – our "callings" given to us by God. Such vocations include our callings as family member, friend, community member, employee, church member. These things are gifts from God, but they are callings filled with responsibilities, opportunities to serve...so many responsibilities. It can be a lot, can't it!

But Jesus is there, in those busy "Martha" times of life, even if we don't seem to notice Him. And so they are holy, sacred times. Jesus is there in the children you care for, the people you interact with at work, the friend you encourage. In serving them, the people whom you can see, you're serving the Lord

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whom you can’t see! Even so, serving is, well, servicing. It takes energy, time, money. Yes, we are “Marthas” in this world.

Because life is busy and tiring, we need times of refreshment, don’t we? Thankfully, Jesus is with us in a special, empowering way, to provide spiritual refreshment. We might call them the “Mary” times of life, when we stop and hear from Him (just like Mary did), and we are refreshed by Him. Jesus comes to us as we listen to Him in His Word, the inviting Word that says, *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Mt. 11:28). The strengthening Word that says, *“I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst”* (Jn 6:35). The encouraging Word that says, *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”* (I Tim 1:15). The freeing Word that says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom 6:23). All of these verses witness to us that Jesus is our Savior. Our living, loving Savior! We take time to be strengthened by Him. That’s what Mary was doing in our lesson when Jesus came to visit. We, like Mary, love Jesus. We listen to Jesus (hopefully often!). In that respect, we are “Marys” in this world.

In the Gospel of John, the 11th chapter, we meet these women, Mary and Martha, again sometime later. Jesus is with them again. And it’s not a happy time this time. No, this time it’s an occasion spilling over with raw emotions; the pain and loss run deep and wide this day, for Mary and Martha’s brother, Lazarus, had died. His death hurts Jesus, too, and He wants to be with this family, with His friends. Finally, Jesus arrives to be with Mary and Martha. Ultimately, he calls out to His dead friend, Lazarus, and raises him from the dead.

Jesus, in this incredible incident declares: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die”* (vv. 25-26). And

Martha makes a remarkable confession of faith, who demonstrates with her words that she is not only a busy-bee around the house, but also attentive to hearing and knowing God’s Word. She says, *“Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world”* (Jn 11:27). With these words, Martha shows she is a “Mary,” one devoted to the One who was devoted to her, one who at her physical death, would still go on living in the heaven that awaits believers in Jesus. (And, by the way, don’t you have a sneaking suspicion that Mary, her sister, was a “Martha,” not spending all her time in prayer and devotion, but also in cooking and cleaning, shopping and marrying, living and dying?)

All of life is holy. That’s what Mary and Martha teach us. All of life belongs to God. He’s involved in all the aspects of life. He’s there at the end of life, too. When strength runs out. When it’s time to “go home.” At that time, these things still hold true: the Lord Jesus has suffered and died for the sins of the world. We are forgiven of her sins. Jesus is the “resurrection and the life.” And where Jesus is, there is life. We have everlasting life in His heaven.

Death is still our greatest enemy. But it is a defeated enemy. It cannot hold us; neither can the grave. Death could not hold Jesus; neither could the grave. Jesus Christ is alive. Where Jesus is, there is life. Remember what He said: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die”*? Words for Mary, for Martha, for you.