

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer (Ps.19). Amen.

The sermon text is from Luke chapter 10:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (NIV)

Hosting in those days was not for the faint of heart! Imagine 15 people came over to your house for the day! It's no big deal for Jesus. He fed 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish... but it's a little hard to blame mortal Martha for her panic. Before the days of microwave ovens and stoves I wouldn't want to feed 15 people. Pizza from Little Caesar's wasn't an option – so much as I'd love to sit at Jesus' feet to listen to Him teach – I get why Martha sweated and worried over a meal for her Honored Guest.

When her frustration finally boiled over, Martha did the unthinkable. She blamed Jesus and brought Jesus into her family spat: *“Don't **you care** that my sister has left me to do all the work? Tell her to help me!”* That's bone-tired frustration talking. It's bad enough Mary lets her down, anyone with siblings understands that. In Martha's mind, **Jesus let** her down... why didn't He see the injustice?

Jesus answered gently, but made clear that Martha had misread the situation. *“Martha, Martha, you are anxious about many things, but one thing is needful; for Mary has chosen the better portion, which won't be taken away.”* Martha thought preparing the food was more important. Jesus reminded Martha that *“no one can live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* Filling the stomach is one thing, but better to be fed portions of God's Word.

You and I have all said or thought what Martha did. Jesus, why don't they help me? Why do the same people get stuck doing all the work at church? Why do 10% do 90% of the work and the giving and the sweating? Yet, in our victim status we find a little bit of self-congratulation. It is hard to find workers in God's Church for councils and work crews and committees, but it's easier than filling Bible classes. Many can watch a three hour ballgame or 2 hour movie but when church hits an hour they run for the door. Truth is, I and probably some of you, are just lazier versions of Martha.

After feeding the 5000, Jesus warned the crowds: "*Don't work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.*" Earthly food can only keep you alive for 70-80 years give or take. God's heavenly food gives eternal life. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul says God's Word "*is able to make you wise unto salvation.*" Peter said, "*Lord, to whom shall we go; you have the words of eternal life.*"

The words of Jesus are the better portion. They are "*living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword,*" Hebrews 4 says. Jesus' words are just as necessary for eternal survival. Important enough to meditate on God's Word in our homes; to teach it to our children; to talk about it when we walk life's road. Important enough to make Sunday school and Bible class a priority on Sunday mornings even during your summer vacation. Jesus' Word is the better portion. And we are blessed to live in a time and place where every Christian home has a Bible, and we live in a land we're free to read and study it together.

Once upon a time, I was talking with someone with a Missouri Synod connection about joining our church. In the course of our talk, he said, "Tell me about what your church has to offer; what activities; what programs you do in the community." I don't

want to be snotty. It's a legitimate question, but wrong-headed, as though what we have to offer is we put on more Blood Drives than the Methodists or hold more Food Drives than the Baptists, comparing church man-hours like stats on a bubble gum card.

In a way it reminded me of youth sports, where we kids used to go out and play ball. Nowadays, we have to buy pants and belts and pay umpires. We've made it better, we think, because we're organized and the kids aren't wearing off-brand blue jeans. But, listen to me, especially for young people with boundless energies and high ideals, the purpose of church isn't to organize your life. Your church needs your energy and your service and your dedication to serving your neighbor. The church suffers when her young self-segregate so you don't have to look at us oldsters. You have a vocation to serve God in your congregation, home, and community, and God commands you to "*do the good works God has prepared in advance for you to do.*" But it's wrong-headed to rate a church by programs and sweat per person. Church is where you are fed and strengthened, where Jesus is present for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Sometimes folks like a church that gives them a life-itinerary of projects and activities. Again, not wrong in and of itself. But, appealing as that may be especially to the young, the one thing needful in church is where Jesus gives you His very body and blood, baptizes you into Christ, speaks words of Law and Gospel, sending you into your workplace, school hallways, summer ball team, with your family and friends. That's where God put you to "*be the light of the world that men may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*"

I'll never forget a few years ago, a father lamenting his friend sending their son to an enthusiastic, charismatic youth church. The dad said how could he blame the guy, he

just wanted the best for his kids. But how good for the kid to be sent to a church that rejected the flesh and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper, that stole away baptizing of babies, that preached conversion as an emotional decision, not a gift of God by grace alone. That kind of gift is like being poked in the eye with a sharp stick. That's a little like Martha. It's not that the Word of Jesus wasn't important, but we like to make what we've got going on a little extra important. The devil doesn't want the church focused on Jesus or to pray with our Introit: "*Lord, turn my feet to Your testimonies; teach me Your statutes.*"

Martha got it wrong, because she thought she was the hostess and Jesus the guest; that the really important things were what she was doing for Jesus, not what He was giving her. Mary got it right, because she saw Jesus as the Host. She sat like a child at His feet. Since all of Christian life is worship, the real issue in our text for today is "What's the proper approach to Christian worship?" Do we first serve the Lord or first be served by Him?

Mary has the right theology of worship and life. Martha thought she honored God by first serving Him and offering up her thanks and praise by doing. That has its place, of course, but Mary rightly honored God by faith's humble acceptance of His Word.

When you step into God's house, His service to you, the Good Shepherd's Divine Service of His little flock, is what really matters. God gives heavenly nourishment, the forgiveness that we desperately need. When Dr. Luther and the Lutheran Reformers began calling our Sunday worship "Gottesdienst" the "Divine Service", they were rejecting the notion that our gatherings are our job or all about what we're doing. We aren't here primarily to give God something He needs from us. We don't offer the Mass

as an unbloody sacrifice to God, but we receive life and grace in the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood. It's not about our "doing", but our receiving forgiveness, life and salvation.

The most important thing for us, as it was for Mary and Martha, is that God serves His gifts. Our prayers and songs and offerings certainly follow receiving God's gifts, but they never eclipse the gift of sitting at the Savior's feet. You'll note even our Christ-centered hymns focus not on me, but focus our praises on the God who saved us through His Son and feeds us by the power of His Holy Spirit.

It's counter-intuitive... it's against the grain to think of God's Word and His Divine Service being where He serves. Jesus said, "*I have not come to be served but to serve and to give My life as a ransom for many.*" We receive Jesus' Divine service, not in the busy-ness of human doing, but in the stillness of listening to the words of Jesus. The Lutheran Reformers wrote in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: "*The highest worship in the Gospel is the desire to receive the forgiveness of sins.*"

For Mary and for Martha, one thing was needful. There would be time later to honor Jesus by cooking and serving Him. Far more important - the one thing needful – was that Jesus serve them with the gifts of His Word of Life. In your life, only one thing is needful, not beating the after church crowd to the restaurant, not being distracted by the daily grind of life. That one thing is Christ the Savior. This Son of God sent from heaven died and rose again that we might be forgiven for all our distracted lives. This Savior, true God and truly human, sends us the one needful thing as He gives us His Holy Spirit through His Word and feeds us at His Table on His life-giving body and blood.

Take a break from your busyness and listen to Jesus: “*Come to Me you who are weary and heavy-burdened and I will give you rest.*” Amen.

And now may the peace of God which surpasses human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.