

+ Luke 10:38-42 + What Do I Need Most? + 9th Sunday after Pentecost + 21 July 2013 +

In the spring of 1998, a large storm system passed through south central Minnesota producing several tornadoes. The system included two F-3 tornadoes that touched down in and outside of a small city called St. Peter. Several of my college classmates and I formed one of the first clean-up crews to help the next day. It was like entering a war zone. Trees had fallen everywhere. Cars had flipped over. Houses were teetering off their foundations with windows blown out and siding ripped off. One tornado had touched down almost on top of the local WELS church and collapsed its roof. The clock at the back of the church was stopped at the exact moment the tornado touched down.

Everywhere you looked there was devastation, but there was one image that I'll never forget. Not far from the church, I saw a woman sitting on her chimney on a slab of concrete where her home once stood. She was holding her head in her hands sobbing. Everything she had was gone.

Looking back on that day, I can't help, but wonder, "What do I need the most? What could I do without if I were in that situation?" If you were limited to the bare minimum of what you need to survive, what would it be? Food? Water? Clothes? Shelter? Something else? What do you really "need"? You do need all those things, but there is one thing you "need" more than food or water or even air. Today Jesus talks about that **"one thing needed"** as he answers the question, **WHAT DO I NEED THE MOST?**

Jesus and his disciples came to a village called Bethany, where a woman named Martha opened her home to them. When they arrived, Martha began preparing a meal for her guests—not only for Jesus, herself and her sister, Mary, but possibly also for the twelve disciples and her brother Lazarus.

As Martha busily prepared dinner, Jesus sat down and began to teach. Mary stopped setting the table and sat down at Jesus' feet. She hung on his every word, listening to everything he had to say. All the while, Martha was distracted in the kitchen. All her preparations pulled her in so many different directions that soon Martha was so flustered she burst out of the kitchen with hands on her hips, **"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself. Tell her to help me!"** Jesus shook his head and said, **"Martha, Martha, 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."** Martha had missed **"the one thing needed."** Her preparations had distracted her from an opportunity to hear God's Word from the Son of God himself.

You and I live in a busy Martha world. Our days are filled with things to do at work, at home, at school, places to go, people to see. When I consider Jesus' words, however, I see my greatest need isn't filled by being busy. Being busy isn't wrong or bad. Jesus himself led a very busy life, but it's so easy to let the busyness of your life get in the way of taking care of your greatest need. When that happens, busyness can become harmful.

We can be a lot like Martha when lesser needs distract us from our greatest need. Consider Jesus' words, **"Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed."** Martha was so worried about cooking this entrée and cleaning that room for Jesus and his disciples that she missed the opportunity Jesus was offering to feed her soul. She was being mentally pulled in every direction. All these lesser needs distracted Martha from her greatest need.

It's no different for you and me. You get distracted by all the little things, all the little "needs" of life, and often miss what's really important—taking care of your greatest need. Life is filled with stress and worry and pull-out-your-hair craziness. You have to schedule everything to keep track of everything, and if anything disrupts that schedule, that sinking feeling of being overwhelmed sets in. You want the best for you and your family.

Yet as much as you'd like the best for you or your family, that attitude can lead you to forget what's really important. *"I gotta be at work by 9. One of the kids has a dentist appointment at 3. They got soccer and basketball this evening. Maybe catch a quick bite to eat with my family before we rush off. The car has some problem with the power steering. Lawn needs to be mowed and the weeds are overtaking the yard. Plus we have VBS starting tomorrow at church! Maybe I'll have a little time to sleep, but I don't have time for personal Bible study and prayer. There's just not enough time in the day!"* Sounds familiar, doesn't it? When was the last time you really took time to dig into God's Word? Is right now the only time you've fed your soul in the past week?

If you were deprived of food or water, you wouldn't hesitate at moment to get them, let alone several days! Why not the Word which provides spiritual food and drink far more important than any water or food? You wouldn't deprive your children of what they need to survive, so why deprive them in any way of the Word which gives them eternal life?

Sometimes you do have valid reasons for missing out on an opportunity to get into God's Word, but how often don't you use your busy lifestyle as an excuse? I know I have. So often I end up saying, "Lord, I'm just too busy for you today. I don't have time for you!" I can see him shake his head at me and say, "Jeremiah, Jeremiah, ***you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.***"

What was the big difference between Mary and Martha? Both loved their Lord. Both wanted to serve him, but the Lord was offering something more important than service. Mary recognized that, but Martha was so busy trying to serve the Lord that she missed this opportunity to live in the Lord. Now there was nothing wrong with what she was doing, but her service wasn't as important as the chance to soak in the Savior's life-giving words. ***"Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."***

You and I often fall into a similar trap. We think, "If I'm busy and active here at church—fixing things, helping out with this or that group, getting this or that program going—that's good enough." You can be active for the Lord, which is noble and praiseworthy, yet still miss the opportunities to live in Christ. You miss opportunities for spiritual growth right in front of you. You get your priorities mixed up. It isn't the activity that gives substance to your faith, but the spiritual growth of your faith through the Word that leads to the activity.

My greatest need and yours is being in Christ! That's what Mary and Martha needed...what you and I need. So how do you fill that greatest need? Well, the Lord has provided means to give you his blessings of grace.

In Holy Baptism, a miracle takes place. The Holy Spirit takes a sinful enemy and changes you into a pure, beloved child of God. Through water and the Word, the Lord does the impossible. He takes you from being outside of Christ to being in Christ—something you can't possibly do on your own. He clothes you with Christ and makes you a son or daughter in God's family.

In our place and for us, Christ didn't let his busy life distract him from the primary purpose for his coming—to fill our greatest need. Jesus did that when he took our sins and worries and neglect and placed them on his own shoulders, so we could live in him. In those baptismal waters, he wiped away your sins and gave you the promise of a new life, as Paul wrote in Titus 3:(5-7), ***"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified (or declared not guilty) by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."***

Following Baptism, the Word keeps you in Christ. Earlier we heard about the Word and the opportunities the Word provides for us to be in Christ. The Word is that spiritual food and drink your soul needs to survive eternally. In the Word you find out how Jesus lived and died for you and why that's relevant for your life right now. That Word reminds you of what took place in your Baptism, as Paul wrote, ***"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your mind because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation."*** (Colossians 1:21-22)

In the Word, you can see how Jesus handled a busy schedule. Every time he got extremely busy, he went off to a solitary place to pray. He took time to talk with his Father. Like Jesus, we need to take a little time each day to keep our souls focused amidst our busy lives. We offer a variety of opportunities here at church to dig into the Word besides worship. We have many resources to help you start family or personal devotions. Regular time in the Word is truly the best stress reliever anyone can find. When you are regularly in the Word, like Mary, you sit at Jesus' feet being nourished with his spiritual food. It keeps you in Christ and motivates you to serve him.

Jesus provides access to his grace in one other way. The Lord's Supper brings you back to Christ, where he reassures you that your sins of distraction are forgiven. He reassures you of rescue from sin and death and refreshes your soul. So often we get distracted with all the worries and stress of life, but in the Supper the Lord invites, ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*** (Matthew 11:28) Every time you partake of Christ's body and blood, he brings you back from wandering through this busy life to living in him. Jesus gives what you need most.

You can be confident that God has answered your greatest need. He doesn't answer it with busyness, but with his Son. Rejoice that the Lord has provided ways for you to receive his wonderful grace. Now consider how you can be better nourished with the Word and Sacraments. The Lord wants you to enjoy his blessings of forgiveness and life and salvation, because only then will you finally have that ***"one thing"*** you need the most. Amen.