

+ Luke 10:38-42 + Series: Why Are We Here? + Theme: ...To Connect People to God's Word +
+ 19th Sunday after Pentecost + 25 September 2016 +

Where do you learn the best? Not all learning environments are created equal. What works well for you may not work for the person sitting next to you. Perhaps you prefer sitting in a desk in a classroom listening and responding to your teacher's questions. Maybe you prefer sitting around a table or room with a group of others engaged in lively conversation as you work through a brief set of discussion questions. Perhaps you prefer a quiet environment where you alone can dig deeper into a subject. Maybe you prefer to collaborate with others. Perhaps you prefer to learn outside surrounded by God's creation or working with your hands as you carefully examine a project in front of you. Maybe you prefer to listen and take notes or you prefer asking questions and talking through solutions.

Back in Jesus' day, the most common learning environment wasn't a formal classroom with desks and whiteboards. They didn't use Skype or PowerPoint or other forms of modern technology. Usually it simply involved a teacher educating his students as they sat around him at his feet. The students sat at the teacher's feet as a show of respect for his learning, while they listened and asked questions and sometimes took notes. It probably looked quite similar to what we do for our children's messages. There was no dishonor in sitting at the feet of a learned teacher. Even today when we don't literally sit at our teachers' feet, we still say "I sat at the feet of So-and-So" for those teachers who influenced us most.

This morning we enter a quiet home in a little village called Bethany only a couple miles from the city of Jerusalem, but the home isn't so quiet today. As soon as you enter the home, you hear a dissonance—two competing sounds that don't really mesh well together.

First you hear the sounds of busyness. A guest has arrived in this lowly home belonging to two sisters—Martha and her sister Mary. They're known to be followers of Jesus of Nazareth, but you can hear Martha bustling around in the kitchen hurriedly trying to prepare a big meal. You see, just before we arrived, Martha heard a knock at the door. To her surprise, the Master, the Teacher, Jesus himself was standing outside their door. Of course, Martha was going to welcome him in, but in her culture, hospitality went beyond a glass of this or that and some snacks. No, if you opened your home to someone, which in this case likely included not just Jesus, Martha, and Mary, but also his twelve disciples, you were typically expected to provide a generous meal for your guests. So Martha got right to work as Jesus came into their home. She busied about in preparation to feed her Lord, but there was a problem. Martha realized she was working alone.

Where was Mary? Well, after Martha welcomed Jesus in and hurried off to the kitchen, Jesus took a seat and began to teach the Word of God. That's the other sound you hear—peaceful teaching. The writer Luke doesn't tell us what Jesus was teaching about, but he does tell us that Mary ***"sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said."*** She didn't rush to the kitchen. It doesn't seem like she even asked a question. She simply sat and listened to her Lord speak the Word of God teaching eternal truth for her soul. She hung on his every word because at that moment, nothing else mattered.

Martha, on the other hand, well, she was distracted. She didn't have time to sit and listen to Jesus. The food wouldn't get done or it would get overdone. The preparations would never be made—and what kind of host would she be for her Lord if she let all of that fall by the wayside while she sat and listened? Yet as well-intentioned as her desire was, all those preparations were pulling Martha in so many different directions that she finally snapped.

Soon Martha was so flustered that she burst out of the kitchen with hands on her hips almost demanding, ***"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*** Jesus looked at Martha with those compassionate, understanding eyes and gently told her, ***"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."*** Amid all her busyness, Martha had missed ***"the one thing needed."*** Her preparations had distracted her from an opportunity to hear the Word of God from the Son of God himself. While Luke doesn't tell us more, you can imagine Martha's hands untying the apron around her waist as she set it aside to sit and listen to Jesus.

When was the last time you sat at the feet of Jesus to drink deeply from his Word? We do live in a busy world. Your days are filled with places to go, people to see, things to do at work, at home, at school. Being busy isn't wrong or bad. Jesus himself led a very busy life, but it's easy to let that ***"one thing needed"*** get pushed to the side with all of that busyness.

In spite of our best-intentioned efforts, you and I can be a lot like Martha losing sight of what is most important. 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 the entrée and preparing the table that she was missing Jesus' offer to nourish her soul. She was being pulled so hard in every direction that Martha's good intentions were actually pulling her away from the ***“one thing needed.”***

All the little “needs” of life can be just as distracting to you and me. Life is filled with stress and worry and pull-out-your-hair craziness. You have to schedule everything to keep track of everything, but if anything disrupts that schedule, you suddenly get that sinking feeling of being overwhelmed. You want the best for your kids, your family, for yourself, so you put more pressure on. You think you “need” all those little things to make life better.

Now that's a well-intentioned desire, but that attitude can make you forget what you need most. *“I gotta be at work by 9. One of the kids has a dentist appointment at 3. They've got soccer and I've got a meeting at church tonight. Maybe we can catch a quick bite to eat. The car is making a strange noise. Lawn needs to be mowed. Weeds are overtaking the yard. Maybe I'll have a little time to sleep, but I don't have time for Bible Class. I certainly don't have time for personal Bible study and prayer. There's just not enough time in the day!”* Sound familiar? When was the last time you sat at Jesus' feet? Is this the only time you've fed your soul with the Word this week?

If you were deprived of food or water, you'd do everything to get them, right? You wouldn't willingly wait several days to get them. 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 there are valid reasons for missing out on an opportunity to connect with God's Word, but how often don't we use our busy lifestyles as an excuse? I know I make excuses to the Lord. “Sorry, Lord, I'm too busy to spend time with you today. I can sit at your feet another day.” And Jesus looks at me and says, “Jeremiah, Jeremiah...”

...But was Martha doing wrong? Is it wrong to want to serve the Lord with my best or with yours? No! Martha loved her Lord and wanted to serve him, but she was so busy serving her Lord that she missed the more important opportunity of sitting at her Savior's feet to listen to his Word. Mary had chosen what was better and Jesus wasn't about to take that away from her.

Sometimes you and I get so busy being about the Lord that we miss being in the Lord. We think, *“If I'm busy here at church—fixing things, helping out with this group or that event, 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 out on connecting with your Lord through his Word. You miss opportunities for spiritual growth right in front of you. Your priorities get mixed up. Activity does not give substance to your faith. No, the spiritual growth of your faith through the Word gives substance to your activity.

That brings us back to the question we started considering last weekend, “Why are we here?” Last week we saw how in regular worship we are here to connect ourselves and others to God through the faithful use of his Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Today we see how and why we need to connect ourselves and others to God's Word. If you are not daily and regularly connected to God's Word, all your activity, all your service to the Lord can make you nothing more than a frustrated, burned-out Martha who forgets the ***“one thing needed.”*** If we do not connect to God's Word, all the work of this congregation is nothing more than wasted, well-intentioned effort, but when we are connected to God's Word, our service bears living, lasting fruit.

The Apostle Paul encouraged us, ***“And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.”*** (Colossians 1:10-12) The Word of God is the spiritual food and drink that your soul needs not only to survive eternally, but to bear fruits of faith abundantly. In the Word you find out how Jesus lived and died for you. You see how in your place and for you, Jesus didn't let his busy life distract him from the primary purpose of his coming—to fill your greatest need. Jesus did that when he took your sins and worries and neglect and placed them on his own shoulders, so you could live in him.

In the Word, you 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 heavenly Father. Like Jesus, you need to take time each day to give your soul rest and renewal through his Word. That's why our congregation and I try to equip you to sit at Jesus' feet in personal devotions or as a family or with group opportunities to spend time with Jesus in his Word. In fact, regular time in the Word is the best stress reliever anyone can find. When you are connected to the Word, you sit at Jesus' feet learning and being nourished and being equipped to serve.

So when was the last time you sat at Jesus' feet in his Word? We're here to connect you to that Word and to your Savior. How can you spend time with Jesus? How can your family? Come and sit at Jesus' feet! Listen to his Word and learn. Soak it in and meditate on it. Come, enjoy the ***"one thing needed"*** and reconnect with your Savior through the Word of God! Amen.