

Luke 10:38-42 + Our Church Studies and Serves + Series: Our Church
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 11th Sunday after Pentecost + 5 August 2018

It happens to parents more often than they care to admit. Your child does something well. They bring home good grades. They do something nice at home. They pull off some fantastic move on the court or playing field. They show some unexpected sign of maturity or ability, and you say to your spouse, “Honey, isn’t OUR kid wonderful? Isn’t OUR child great?” You have no problem claiming that child as your own. In fact, that child is OUR child!

...But then your child acts up. They’re naughty. They get in trouble. They’re disobedient. They mouth off. They push a joke too far. They fail to be responsible or thoughtful. They fail at school when they have the ability to succeed. So what do you say to your spouse in that moment? “Honey, isn’t OUR kid wonderful”? Or is it “Honey, what’s the matter with YOUR child?” While that child IS yours, in that moment you’d rather they not be yours.

Do you ever do that with our church? Sometimes it’s OUR church. “OUR church offers all kinds of opportunities for kids and families.” “OUR church is a warm and welcoming family where people care and people serve.” “OUR church teaches the Word of God.” Yet sometimes we’re tempted to think OUR church is YOUR church. You don’t like a decision that’s made. You don’t like the way things are run or something about what we do or how we teach. You’re tempted to distance yourself in some way from OUR church. Yet is Cross of Christ MY church, YOUR church, or OUR church? Because God has made this church OUR church, we take ownership of it all—good and bad, fun and not so much, joyful and frustrating—because our God has made this church OUR church.

So what does OUR church do? Last week, we learned how OUR church worships Christ. Today, **OUR CHURCH STUDIES AND SERVES**. Today, we join Mary at the feet of Jesus, her Teacher and ours. We also join Martha, her sister, who loves to serve her Lord.

We find their lowly home in the little village of Bethany bustling with activity. Pots clanging. Water boiling. Instructions being shouted. You see, Jesus had stopped by unexpectedly. Of course, Martha was going to welcome him. She and her sister and their brother Lazarus were faithful followers of Jesus, but in her culture, hospitality went beyond a glass of something and some snacks.

No, if you opened your home to someone, which here likely included not just Jesus, Martha, and Mary, but also his twelve disciples and even others, you were typically expected to provide a generous meal for your guests. So Martha got right to work. 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 prepare the meal, Jesus took a seat and began to teach the Word of God. The writer Luke simply tells 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. Mary 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 to serve was, all those preparations were pulling Martha in so many different directions that she finally snapped.

Martha became so flustered that she burst out of the kitchen with hands on her hips practically 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 compassion 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.”**

Amidst all her busyness, Martha had missed **“the one thing needed.”** Her preparations had distracted her from an opportunity to hear God’s Word from God himself. You can imagine Martha’s hands untying the apron around her waist as she set it aside to sit and listen to Jesus next to her sister.

When was the last time you sat at the feet of Jesus to drink deeply from his Word? We 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, in the community. 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. Martha was so worried about serving her Lord that she was missing Jesus' offer to serve her. 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, family, church, self, so you put more pressure on. You think you "need" all those little things to make life better.

In spite of your good intentions, though, 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. You wouldn't willingly wait days or weeks to get them. "I can get that later when it's convenient." 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 study God's Word, but how often don't we use our busyness as an excuse? I've made too many excuses myself. "Sorry, Lord, I'm too busy to spend time with you today. I'll study at your feet another day." Then Jesus looks at me and says, "Jeremiah, Jeremiah..."

...But was Martha 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 to sit 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 and what our God wants, yet still miss out on spending time at Jesus' feet 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.

You see, if you don't spend regular time studying 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."** In fact, if OUR church does not study at Jesus' feet, all the work of OUR church is nothing more than wasted, well-intentioned effort.

Yet when we do spend time studying God's Word, reading God's Word, hearing God's Word, our service bears living, lasting fruit. The Apostle Paul encourages 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 is the spiritual food 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 worry and neglect and sin and placed them on his 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. In fact, regular time in the Word is the best stress reliever anyone can find. When you are in the Word, you sit at Jesus' feet being nourished and equipped so you can get up and serve.

You see, at some point, Martha and Mary got up from listening to Jesus and finished preparing that meal. Jesus had fed their souls, so they responded with heartfelt, thankful service. OUR church studies at Jesus' feet, and

then OUR church gets up to serve our Savior, to serve our Lord by serving each other and all the others around us. What does that look like? Consider what Paul wrote in Romans 12[:1}, ***“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”***

Because we know God’s mercy, our lives are now lived as ***“living sacrifices,”*** using the unique set of gifts and abilities that God has given to each of us in each of the unique callings God has given to each of us. That means we take ownership of serving our Lord. We don’t just leave it to others as if this was YOUR church rather than OURs. In a positive way, we can be Marthas, using our gifts, our abilities, our time, our treasures to serve our Lord whether that’s here at church or in your home or at school or out in your community. Yet it all starts with spending time with Jesus in his Word each day. That’s the fuel that enables us to serve.

What does OUR church do? OUR church worships Christ. OUR church studies at Jesus’ feet. OUR church, then, gets up to serve. God grant us the ability to live as living sacrifices motivated by his mercy and love! Amen.