
Sermon In A Sentence: Like Martha, we think that the important thing is doing - but Jesus teaches us to sit - to listen - to learn - to love.

Our story starts, "As Jesus and His disciples went on their way, Jesus entered into a certain village" (v. 38). That raises two questions. First, Jesus and His disciples were on their way - on their way where? We find the answer to that question in the last chapter - chapter 9. It says that Jesus "intently set his face to go to Jerusalem" (9:51). Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem - on His way to the cross - on His way to die. Sort of puts a spin on everything else which is to follow, doesn't it?! Second, where was this "certain village" that Jesus entered? Luke doesn't say, but the Gospel of John tells us that the name of the village was Bethany (John 11:1) - and that Bethany was near Jerusalem (John 11:18).

John also tells us that Martha and Mary have a brother - Lazarus - and that, shortly before Jesus' death, He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:17-44). Martha, Mary, and Lazarus are friends of Jesus. Jesus is popular, and many people would be proud to have Him as a guest in their house. John tells us that Jesus loved all three of them (John 11:5).

Martha welcomed Jesus into her house, and then went to the kitchen to fix dinner. Mary, Martha's sister, did NOT go to the kitchen to help, but instead "sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word" (v. 39). That seems OK to me. You can't just abandon your guest while everyone works in the kitchen.

But it wasn't OK with Martha. Luke says that Martha "was distracted with much serving" (v. 40a). You know how that feels, don't you! You have experienced being "in over your head" - "distracted with much (work)." You have wanted help, and didn't know where to turn. I have been there too. I'm a lot like Martha. I like to work, and I usually pitch in and do my part. Sometimes I end up working while others sit around chatting. Maybe, like me, you know how Martha felt.

So Martha, angry at being abandoned in the kitchen, came to Jesus and said, "Lord!" Now don't miss that little word – "Lord." The first word out of Martha's mouth acknowledges Jesus as Lord. Good job, Martha! But then Martha, who has just acknowledged Jesus as Lord, rebukes Him. First, she asks if Jesus doesn't care that Mary isn't helping. Then she gives Jesus an order: "Tell my lazy sister to get into the kitchen to help me." Well, those aren't the exact words that Luke uses to report this incident, but that's what Martha meant!
Now that kind of outburst has a tendency to make everyone angry. If you are Mary, you wonder why Martha didn't just say - to you rather than to Jesus - "Mary, I need some help." Mary would have helped her. And if you are the guest - like Jesus - it's embarrassing to have your hostess blow up like that.

I'm sympathetic to Martha. I sometimes get angry when I feel that I'm doing all the work. I have surely said a few angry words in my life - very much like Martha did. Having been there and done that, I know what Martha could have done differently. Listen carefully, because this might help you to know what to do next time you're angry.

Here's what Martha could have done. Instead of stomping into the living room and chewing out Jesus and Mary, she could have gone into her bedroom and closed the door. Martha could have prayed this way: "God, I'm so angry. Something is tempting me to go out there to spew my anger all over Jesus and Mary - but I know that would be wrong. God, please drain this anger out of my heart. Help me to feel love for Jesus, my guest, and Mary, my sister. And then help me to ask Mary nicely for help."

Then, after praying, Martha could have stayed there a minute to let the anger drain - and then she could have gone into the living room and asked Mary nicely for help. That would have been so much better.

Next time you're angry and want to say angry words and do angry things, try that. Try going to a private place for a few minutes - or just shutting out the noise - and ask God to help. If you ask God to help you with your anger, God will help you. Give it a try.

I've preached a number of sermons on this scripture over the years, but I always struggle with it - because I am more like Martha than Mary. I want someone to appreciate Martha and those of us who are like Martha.

And it suddenly occurred to me how Mary's focus on her relationship with Jesus was so right - and how Martha's anger was so disruptive. Jesus said as much. He said: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the good part, which will not be taken away from her" (vv. 41-42).

As I say those words, I feel sorry for Martha. I want Jesus to commend Martha for her work. I want him to say, "Mary, let's both go in there and give Martha a hand." But instead, He says: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the better part."
Is there anything in this little story for us? I believe there is. We are such busy people, and we live in such a busy world. It's easy to miss the important things.

The story of Martha and Mary tells us that there is value in sitting - in listening - in learning - in loving. Like Martha, we think the important thing is doing - but Jesus teaches us to sit - to listen - to learn - to love.

Whether at home or work or school, take a moment to look around and find the blessings. Take a moment to thank God for giving you another day. Sit at God's feet for just a moment. Be quiet. Listen. Treasure the moment. We live in a Martha world, but take time to be Mary for just a bit. Jesus says that that's the one thing that's needed. He says that's the good part that won't be taken from you. Give it a try. You'll find a blessing! You'll find that Jesus was right.

Peace friends,

Chuck