

The Gospel According to Luke

Luke 10:38-42

Reading: Luke 10:38-42

Sermon #47

September 1, 2019

Devoted or Distracted?

Setting

Today, is yet is another account that is preserved for us only by Luke. This is the encounter Jesus has with Mary and Martha in the village of Bethany about 2 miles outside of Jerusalem. This text is all about welcoming a guest into one's home, it is about hospitality and it is about devotion and distraction. Under normal circumstances, Martha's behavior would be correct and Mary's would be wrong. However, this encounter and this guest is far from normal. The guest reclining and teaching in their home is not a normal visitor but the King of kings and Lord of lords. The visitor is God's Living Word who is eternal and brings the gospel of eternal life. The words Jesus shares with this household are the Words of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, words that bring eternal life for those who believe.

I do not believe it is an accident that this short story follows the account of the Good Samaritan. The Priest and Levite, the religious leaders, who refused to be even hospitable to the wounded man in need and a lawyer who did not understand who his neighbors were. Here is the short story of 2 sisters who welcome Jesus into their home as Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem. This is the home of their brother Lazarus and they opened it to the one who people said was more than a rabbi, more than a prophet and who was the long-awaited Messiah. So, there was an understanding and acceptance of who Jesus was by some.

Martha welcomes Jesus into the house. However, it is Mary, not Martha by her behavior that demonstrates her understanding of who Jesus is, he is the promised One. Jesus' words bringing eternal life but they must be heard with the mind and heart unto belief. The Lawyer in our account last week heard what Jesus said but there was no indication that he really heard and believed. Martha welcomes Jesus, but verse 39 tells us it is, [“Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching.”](#) Mary gives Jesus her undivided attention, Jesus is teaching and she is truly listening.

We have 2 sisters; 1 devoted and 1 distracted. One is listening intently to Jesus' teaching and the other, as we read in verse 40, [“Martha was distracted with much serving.”](#) Not only is Martha distracted but she becomes agitated and anxious because Mary is not focused on the preparing and serving like she is.

Devotion

We have an example of Mary who is the picture of discipleship. Her devotion to Jesus is seen very clearly as we are told she was sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to His teaching. Her attention was fixed on Christ and His every Word. The words of Jesus had captivated her. The cares and distractions of this life had faded and all she was focused on was the teaching of Jesus. As Paul made clear, [“how are they to believe in ~~him~~ Jesus if they have never heard? ... For¹⁷ faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”](#) (Romans 10:14 & 17) We are not told who else was there or what Jesus was teaching. In my mind's eye I can see Jesus explaining the gospel and Mary's mind, heart and soul awakening to eternal truth. But whatever Jesus is teaching, Mary is focused on him and his teaching.

It is important to take note of Mary's posture – she is sitting at Jesus' feet. This was the tradition; students would sit as the teacher taught. Often the teacher stood and the students were seated around. Here Jesus is sitting and so Mary sits at his feet showing submission to his authority. Luke is telling us that Mary was submissive and listening – she was truly hearing and absorbing and contemplating. She was more than a student; Mary was becoming a disciple. We have all had to learn technical skills to perform tasks, but being a disciple means one follows a way of life that becomes who they are. Does this describe you? If one calls themselves a Christian that implies they are a disciple of Jesus Christ and the way and purpose of their life reveals this completely. Does this describe your life?

As you read this short passage can you sense the peace Mary is experiencing? As she listens to the Messiah her heart is opened to truth and she knows true peace. Do you sense the peace in Mary's heart? She is calm and content to listen to and be with Her Lord. The time she is spending with Jesus is more important to her than anything else. Jesus said to his disciples, his true followers, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”** (John 14:27) So the peace Mary was experiencing is one of the gifts Jesus gives his disciples. When one reads of the martyrs slain for their belief that Jesus is truly the Christ; as gruesome as their deaths were, they had peace and exhibited peace. Life is full of trials and difficulties, during these times do you have peace in Christ and do those around you see your peace? They may not understand your peace, it may even infuriate them and make them angry because without Christ they cannot understand such peace, but a life of peace found in Christ speaks to the people in one's life. Having peace is both an inward and outward sign the Spirit of God lives within you. I believe Mary was experiencing this peace.

Distraction and Anxiety

Last week we examined with great interest a lawyer who refused to listen to Jesus with more than his ears. There are many other stories in the gospel accounts of people who heard Jesus but did not hear. Remember when Jesus was 12 and was in the temple, “[all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.](#)” (John 2:47) Yet, there is no indication they heard and believed. In our passage this morning Mary was hearing and absorbing and believing, but Martha is distracted and her distraction brings anxiety and anxiety brings frustration. Martha is focused on the tasks of the world. Maybe she is overwhelmed with knowing Jesus is the Messiah and wanting everything perfect in order to serve the Perfect One. Jesus is telling us that when one is focused on the worldly there are 2 enemies of building a relationship with him, of being devoted to him. They are the distractions of the world and the anxiety these distractions bring. I am going to make a bold statement here; allowing distractions and the anxiety into one’s life that takes our focus off of and damages our relationship with Christ, when this happens it is sin. Martha is sinning. She has let the tasks take her focus off of Jesus and this brings anxiousness and her mind is troubled. I wonder if she considered delaying the meal until after Jesus’ teaching? That action would have gone against normal custom, but how many people have the opportunity to sit at the feet of the living God?

Now Martha’s behavior is a reaction to her distraction; “[she went up to Jesus and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’](#)” Martha’s priorities are wrong, which leads to wrong behavior. She was not at peace, as her behavior demonstrates. I am, like Martha more than I want to admit. How about you? Do you let the distractions of daily life interfere with your relationship with Jesus? Do you see the tasks and feel the urgency and

set aside the absolutely critical time needed with Jesus? As Paul instructed, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ **do not be anxious about anything**, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7) Time with Christ brings one to the eternal and time spent in the business of the world is daily with no eternal benefit, but these tasks are needed and we are to provide and care for the needs of our family, but we must not, like Martha, get our priorities wrong. What is the priority of daily tasks? Jesus said, “**Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.**” (Matthew 6:34) Is your mind caught up and entangled with things that at the end of the day, really do not matter much? Here is what we see, Martha’s mind was stuck in this world and all her responsibilities - while Mary’s thinking was on the kingdom. Martha was stuck in sinful anxiety while Mary was at peace.

I said Martha was sinning, let me define what I mean. Depending on the context, anxiety may be one of four general types: (1) a God-given emotional response for our benefit, (2) a disordered physiological response that is not sinful, (3) a natural consequence of sin, or (4) sinful responses to God’s providential care. Let me give you quick definitions and how we can distinguish between the four types. We first need to start by clarifying what we mean by anxiety and understand 1 and 2 are related to each other, as are types 3 and 4.

To understand God-given emotional response, it is helpful to start by distinguishing anxiety from the related concept of fear. Anxiety and fear are closely related, because they are similar emotions working on different timeframes.

Fear is an emotional response to a real or perceived *immediate* peril; anxiety is an emotional response to a real or perceived *future* threat. Fear is a emotional warning system that alerts us to immediate danger, while anxiety is a warning system of impending future threat.

If one is confronted with an immediate threat to their life, oh, such as, encountering a dangerous animal, they would experience fear and flee for their own safety and survival. An immediate feeling of anxiety or fear may trigger a natural, God-given emotional response for survival. That sort of anxiety is not what is considered sinful.

Next we have physiological anxiety, which is what we normally think of as clinical anxiety. For some people, anxiety manifests as a physiological malfunction that has become both disordered and debilitating. Some symptoms include persistent anxious thoughts on most days of the week or when the anxiety interferes with daily functioning or when a person has anxiety-related symptoms; such as trouble sleeping or functioning at work. These are often symptoms of a medical condition; anxiety disorder, panic disorder or social anxiety. In such cases a person should seek help from a counselor or physician. This sort of anxiety is also not the type most would consider sinful.

The third type is a natural consequence of sinful behavior. Here are some examples of what I mean; someone takes drugs and develops an anxiety disorder or cheating on their spouse, they may become anxious about their marriage falling apart or someone who gambles away all their money may become anxious about how they are going to pay their bills. In these cases, the anxiety is the result of their sin.

Finally, we have the fourth type, sinful responses to God's providential care. This is anxiety that results because we lack trust in God. I, at times, lack in my trust of God by wanting to be in charge, but this is usually momentary and not a pattern in my life. But this is the type Jesus and Paul were referring to in the passages I quoted earlier. Let me take a moment and read Jesus' instruction to his disciples about anxiety. Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. ³² Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:22-32) Jesus is saying if we surrender to him, if we trust him, we can deal with anything that comes in this life and know his peace. If you are feeling distracted and anxious you need to stop, seek God and ask him to strengthen your faith and increase your trust and help you to not let the worries of this world overwhelm you or you might fall into sin.

Distractions cause us to lose our interest and ability to submit to Christ's teaching. Martha was so busy and she is missing the point. So, rather than submitting to the authority of Jesus, she barges in and tries to tell Him what to do, look at verse 40, [“she went up to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’”](#) Can you believe that Martha would be so arrogant as to tell Jesus what to do? She is not submissive, she wants to control. What is it that is so important that Martha would interrupt Jesus right in the middle of His teaching? We can become consumed with things that really simply do not matter. We can let a task override our need to be with Christ. Let me ask, “What is distracting you from sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His Word?”

The 2 best places to sit at the feet of the Lord are in morning study and prayer and meditation of God's Word, and in church on Sunday mornings. Do you let the tasks of the day keep you from spending time in God's Word? Are you distracted when you come to worship? Do you arrive early anticipating what the Lord will reveal to us or do you just barely make it? Are you often late? Do you leave right after because you have some pressing distraction? Do you let life's distraction's keep you from coming to church? Do you struggle to find time to be with God, your Creator? What is the answer to the sin of distractions?

Sit down and do some soul searching and make a list of priorities. It may be that you should give up some things and for some maybe a lot of things. Are you so busy, you cannot serve the Lord in the church? We must understand that distractions are sin and therefore, the answer is to repent and make changes. One indication of distractions in your life is that you do not submit to the Word of God – you are too busy to submit. You are too busy doing everything that you believe must be done today and letting these tasks interfere with the critical time needed to

be with your Lord. What Martha was really telling Jesus? That he needed to be quiet until the important things are finished, the meal was served and the kitchen cleaned and then after they are done - He could teach.

Jesus' focus was different than Martha's, he was more concerned for Martha's soul than anything else, reading at verse 41, "the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary.'" In Matthew's gospel account we understand Martha has a heart issue that needs correction. Jesus says, ¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21) As we read this short story these questions come to mind; "Where was Martha's heart? Was it on the things of God or the things of earth? Where is your heart?"

Anxiety is produced when we care too much about the wrong things. Anxiety is a good indicator that something is wrong. You can take a pill to lessen it and make it more bearable, but anxiety is speaking to you about the condition of your heart and soul. Jesus was lovingly telling Martha that something was very wrong with her thinking and her soul. Jesus is expressing disapproval and shows concern. There were more important things at this moment than an elaborate meal. Martha was missing the Gospel. Her mind was literally thinking about everything except what it should have been thinking about.

Good Portion

Jesus ends with, Martha "one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the **good portion, which will not be taken away from her.**" Martha was troubled about many

things, but there was only one thing that was important - Christ's words, his teaching of the gospel of eternal life. Listening and submitting to the Word of God is the "good portion" that will not be taken away. Can there be anything more important than complete and undistracted attention to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and the Word of God that changes who we are?

Luke gives us a contrast to teach us proper behavior. Mary was listening to Jesus' words, the gospel and becoming a disciple. Perhaps Martha's heart was opened as Jesus corrects her and she realized that the things she had been doing were trivial compared to listening to the words of Christ. The Bible does not say if Martha understood at that point in time, but something changed in Martha's heart at some point. Her treasure was changed from earthly things to heavenly things. At some point she got it and everything clicked. How do we know? Let me read to you from John's gospel account. Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha and friend of Jesus had died. Beginning in John chapter 11, verse 17, "Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days." ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.' Martha has come to understand Jesus is more than a teacher, but has a special relationship with God. ²³ Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' ²⁴ Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Martha has come to understand what the Sadducee's did not – that there is a resurrection of the mortal dead to eternal life. ²⁵ Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?'

²⁷ She said to him, 'Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.'" (John 11:17-27) There it is here in the last statement of faith by Martha; she believes Jesus is the Christ. She is no longer distracted.

Is your life full of distractions? Do you find yourself anxious and troubled? Allow those emotions to point to the fact that something needs to be different. Let the superficial go, as Martha leaned to do, and grab hold of the eternal. Be devoted to Christ and not distracted from Christ. Martha did it and so can you. Amen and amen!