

Grace: God's undeserved love for each and every one of us. Mercy: God forgiving us our sin for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. And Peace: Peace of heart, peace of mind, peace with God. All of these are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is our Gospel lesson, found in the Gospel according to Saint Luke, the tenth chapter, beginning at the thirty-eighth verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "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."

Heavenly Father, these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth, Your word is truth. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

How do you know what is most important to you? Is it based on the amount of time that you spend on it? Is it based on the importance that you, rather subjectively, place on it? Or maybe is it based on what your friends and family think about it?

I ask these questions because it is of utmost importance for us today. Not because I say so, but because God says so. And if we look at the three qualifications I listed, I think that we can see that God may not be all that "important" to us. I think about the sheer lack of time we spend with Him, by reading His word and in prayer. I think of how on Sunday morning God is important, but maybe on Wednesday night He has lost His immediacy and importance. I think of the fact that many people and families

are turning more and more from God and allowing God to be replaced.

And now that we are lacking in importance, what about when it comes to what is needed? Is a good nutritious meal needed, or is fast food okay? Is a day off needed, or will a couple of hours suffice? Is daily reading of Scripture needed, or will hearing it on Sunday morning be okay? And maybe all of these were running through Martha's head when she approached Jesus. She was upset, she wanted help, she wanted her sister to do something... but Jesus pointed out that Mary had indeed chosen what was better. Therefore, let us remember ***The One Thing Needful.***

The history of Jesus at Bethany is one that is known by most people. Jesus, while passing through the town came upon a house. He decided He was going to stay a while. As He stayed with Mary and Martha, Martha was a busy, busy lady. She cooked, cleaned, took care of the house, and still tried to make time to hear Jesus. But Mary... oh Mary. All she did was sit around and listen to Jesus. At this, Martha

became upset and, basically, scolded Jesus telling Him, "Tell her to help me!" She wanted Jesus to tell Mary to get up and help. Martha was tired of doing everything herself... she wanted help. Have you ever felt this way?

I do so much for this church, when is it someone else's turn? I've served on the Board of Elders for the past 15 years, when is it the next guy's turn? I've cleaned this church every week for the past ten years, why can't someone else help? I serve treats every week, why can't someone else do it? These are all ways we begin to get a complex like Mary. We serve and serve and serve and feel like we are getting nothing from the experience. And not only are we serving, but we are beginning to get angry at the service we are offering. In the beginning we enjoyed it. It was fun and new and, maybe, a little exciting. But now that we've been doing it for a while we are tired of it. In the beginning we saw the beauty and purpose, but now... the purpose escapes us. And that is how Martha was feeling. Jesus came into her house to spend time and she was thrilled... but then she lost that joy. She lost the purpose, she just began

mindlessly serving. Not listening and spending time with Jesus, just serving.

This happens so often in churches, and it happened right in front of Jesus also. We know that we shouldn't be like Martha, or at least we are told that we shouldn't be like Martha, but we end up like her sometimes, because, well, things need to get done, right? But is being like Martha really all that bad? I don't want to just beat up on Martha, because, honestly sometimes things do just need to get done.

While God does not want us to lose our joy and our purpose, God does want us to continue in our service. So Martha's sin, and our sin, is not that we serve too much; rather, it is that when we serve we forget why we serve. We begin to see all the negatives and forget all the positives. We see how others don't help, instead of seeing that we are serving our Lord.

But looking at the flip side, I think we all need to make sure that we do not become too much of a Mary either. Now, I pray that this concept does not catch you off guard, but really think about it. While we do not want to get

completely wrapped up in working and serving... we also do not want to neglect our work and service. Notice from the text that Jesus never chastises Martha, He never tells her that work is unneeded; rather, Jesus says that presently Mary chose what was better. So, we also need to recognize that things do need to get done. We should take time to serve our God and to serve our neighbors and to serve and work about our church... but it should not get in the way of hearing the voice of Jesus. When we start to neglect God, when we start to forget the joy and purpose for our serving, when we start to have negative feelings about our service, then we sin against God, and Jesus is there to remind us to listen to Him. As the hymn we sang states, "Then with Mary's full surrender, I would offer Thee my heart, At Thy feet my tribute render, As my chosen better part. For Mary's heart burning with fervent emotion, was quickened to serve Thee with perfect devotion; And there filled with love for her Savior and Lord, Was, with the One needful, in blessed accord." Also Kretzmann notes, "Note: We have here two forms of service, each done to the Lord, each with the best of intentions, the

one with the work of the hands, the other in listening to the words of eternal wisdom. They need not clash, but have their worth, if the relation of values is always regarded, and first things are placed first.”

When we look at the life of our Savior, we see a great example of this concept... being both a Martha and a Mary. Jesus led a life of perfect obedience to God. Jesus did a lot of work and a lot of service throughout His life: healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, curing lepers, forgiving sinners... Jesus led a life of work. He did so much throughout His life, and then he died. These are all ways that Jesus served us and God. Jesus' entire life was one of service... but never a spiteful, neglectful, irritated service. He was focused on saving us, focused on saving all people and He lived a life that reflected that. He was like Martha.

But Jesus also led a life of perfect communion with God. He was found to be in constant prayer to God His Father. He was found to be regularly reading and preaching God's Word. He was a Mary. He made sure to take time to be

alone with God, to listen to Him, to sit at His feet... to hear Him.

Jesus did both of these actions, because they are what make up a God pleasing life. It is not one over the other, but rather, one in conjunction with another. Serving people, and hearing God's Word. Fixing the church, but putting God's Word first. Serving on the Council, and making sure that the Word has its proper place.

This is what we need to do with our life. We do not need to pick one of the two sisters to follow, we need to have a little of both of them. And when we don't, when we get angry about the amount we are serving, when we get hurt because we feel others aren't doing their fair share... we need to remember to turn to God's Word. And in God's Word we hear about Abraham, who was sitting under trees and he noticed some men coming. He made sure to invite them, to prepare a feast for them, to serve them... but also to hear God and His Word. We read about David, a man after God's own heart. We hear how he was a great king, but he was

always at war. He was constantly at war and he ended up taking great pride in his army and in himself... he stole a man's wife, he killed people, he disobeyed God... but he finally did come to hear God's Word. It stung when Nathan proclaimed him a sinner, but by ignoring God's Word and focusing on the "work to be done" he had strayed, but once he heard God's Word again, he was right with God. And there are countless others.

So remember, when you start to tend more to be like Martha, it's okay. Just relax and remember what God wants us to know and hear. We need to be reminded that Mary, listening to Christ, chose what was better. And when we become like Mary, we need to make sure that we do not neglect our service to God and to others. But when we do... when we trend one way or the other, we can come to God and pray for forgiveness. Forgiveness for not perfectly fulfilling God's Law. Forgiveness for sinning. And when we receive it, like Mary we receive what is better... and what will not be taken away from us. When God forgives us, it is ours. We have it. God promises and we receive. This

is what happens when we come before God and hear His Word.

Dear friends in Christ, so many times I have heard Martha bad-mouthed because she was working and trying to make things right. I think her bigger sin was not taking time out to listen to Christ and God's Word.

It is not a sin to do God's work and Will. It is definitely not a sin to hear God's Word. Like Jesus, we can strive for balance in what we do and how we do it. But when we sin, we can come before God and ask for and receive forgiveness.

Thank God that He has done so much for us. Thank God that He allows us to serve Him and to hear His Word. Thank God, that He always brings us back to the one thing needful. Amen.