

“Valued For Who We Are”
Message by DD Adams
Providence Kemptown UM Church
9th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
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Today’s gospel lesson is from Luke, chapter 10, verses 38 through 42. I’m reading from Eugene Peterson’s translation, *The Message*. As they continued their travel, Jesus entered a village. A woman by the name of Martha welcomed him and made him feel quite at home. She had a sister, Mary, who sat before the Master, hanging on every word he said.

But Martha was pulled away by all she had to do in the kitchen. Later, she stepped in, interrupting them. “Master, don’t you care that my sister has abandoned the kitchen to me? Tell her to lend me a hand.” The Master said, “Martha, dear Martha, you’re fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it—it’s the main course, and won’t be taken from her.”

This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. Let’s pray. God we pray your soft tender touch on each heart here today. Enlighten minds, sharpen our hearing, and lead us to surrender just a little bit more of that self-will asking you to replace it with your will. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. Peace be with.

The month of July we’ve talked about discipleship. We looked at Naaman, a Syrian general who happened to be a leper. He was brought to faith in the God of Israel and was restored physically and spiritually. Next we looked at the parable of the Good Samaritan—which described the sacrificial and ethical values of Christ

who heals our wounds, cares for us, and promises to come back. This week we have the story of Mary and Martha.

Jesus enters the home of Martha after receiving an invitation. Martha begins the task of what is probably food preparation, and Mary sits at the feet of Jesus and listens. Martha has a lot to prepare for their guest, and before too long, she gets upset at her sister for not helping.

Martha goes to Jesus feeling abandoned by Mary with the work at hand, and wonders why Jesus doesn't seem to care. Martha wants to get Mary busy doing something—something like what *she's* doing! Jesus tells Martha she's fussing and getting worked up over nothing. Jesus replies, "One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it—it's the main course and won't be taken from her."

Looking at the roles of women during that time period, women were pretty much limited to domestic work and raising the children. When Jesus comes into Mary and Martha's home, Martha went right into her expected role of serving and showing hospitality, which was very important in that day. Then we have Mary doing the very opposite of what the present day culture expects. The position Mary took of sitting at Jesus' feet and listening and learning was reserved for men—not women.

If we took a critical view, we might look down on Mary for enjoying Jesus' company, showing the guest some attention, and taking in every word; this could be regarded as hospitality too however. We could ask ourselves the question, "Does Jesus call us to *only* read, study, and pray? Or is discipleship also accompanied by putting into action what's been shown to us from the life and ministry of Jesus?" So, what is the criteria for being a disciple of Christ?

Let's get another picture of Martha. Mary and Martha had a brother named Lazarus who had been dead and in a tomb for four days. Jesus was on his way back to Bethany when Martha heard he was coming. She ran out to meet Jesus while

Mary stayed in the house. Martha was naturally upset with Jesus for not coming sooner, but she immediately agreed and confessed saying, “I know that [Lazarus] will rise in the resurrection on the last day.”

Jesus replied, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” [Martha] replied, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, God’s Son, the one who is coming into the world.” So we see that Peter wasn’t the only one who proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah! Martha proclaimed what had been revealed to her too.

Now taking a look at Mary. In the Luke text that was read, we get a picture of Mary’s focus and attentiveness to the words of Jesus. Surely that’s one of the places faithfulness begins. Mary loves Jesus and listens and learns. In John 12, we see Mary anointing the feet of Jesus to prepare him for burial—this could’ve been anywhere between 20 to 30,000 dollars.

Mary’s listening and learning turned into action! But we can’t ignore Jesus’ comment to Martha either when he said, “Martha, dear Martha, you’re fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it—it’s the main course and won’t be taken from her.”

We don’t know where Martha’s heart was exactly, but that’s not our ministry to figure out anyway. Only God knows the heart of someone, but we sure do love it when people attend worship and follow through with doing the work of the church in the world!

One thing we do know is this—any amount of fussing, comparing, or pitting ourselves against each other is not the role of a disciple, but, we all have our moments. We’re human. When we allow ourselves to be pulled or dragged in different directions we’re not present with what God is trying to teach us.

Distractions from the world or personality weaknesses that haven't been surrendered to God have this way of stealing a disciples' power to love.

By Martha's fussing and comparison she's trying to do her works in her own strength. It's the words of Christ that brings the heart into a posture that's ready and willing to sacrifice for the welfare others. Listening prepares our hearts—for without spending time with Christ the discipleship picture isn't complete. Listening, reading, and praying God's word brings clarification and draws us closer in relationship.

Both listening and doing are needed for discipleship. Nowadays, some cultures commend persons for their hard work, and that can be near to 24/7. Are we too busy? Maybe the "one thing needed" as Jesus said, is a balance between prayer and listening to God's word and then a doing of it in different ways of giving and serving? The spiritual formation and discipleship process in life is different for everyone, but balance between listening and doing are both important.

Our busyness and fussing are rooted in good intentions, and we all know the Church needs many Martha's who serve within a congregation and provide for communities in a myriad of ways. Still, to make the discipleship picture complete there must be a worshipping and listening to God's word. And when God's word travels down into the heart, it will produce a change that's eternal and serves not only the world and the church, but that person as well.

Mary and Martha made their choice on how to worship Christ that day in Bethany. Both women and the roles they chose are needed, valued, and affirmed by God—minus the fussing and comparison that is! The Lord valued Mary and Martha and loved them both for who they were at that moment. Both are equal in God's eyes and loved.

Let's pray. God who loves us for who we are, there's no one like you. You value us as no one else can. Your love is completely unconditional and it's wider,

longer, higher, and deeper than anything we can imagine. We bless your unmatchable name and thank you for loving us for who we are as we continue to grow spiritually giving ourselves to you and to others. Amen.