

Text: Luke 10:38-42

Title: Preparing for Jesus

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

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We have 26 days until Christmas! Which means: bringing down the decorations from the attic, purchasing a tree, getting presents for the children and extended family—whose presents need to be mailed ten days early to ensure their arrival is on time. Then there's the trips to the airport to pick up visitors, the meal needs to be planned, the guest list, the Christmas cookies, organizational parties and gifts...oh yeah don't forget about the church services and the special Christmas events.

Christmas the day designated to celebrate the presence of God in our lives which has the potential to be turned into a financial burden and a hassle. It's easy to lose focus like Martha who got distracted with all her preparations.

Scripture tells us that Lazarus, Mary and Martha were Jesus personal friends. Whenever Jesus was in town He would stop at their house for a visit. & Martha would then set out to meet the hunger needs, extending her hospitality.

It is an awesome skill what cooks are able to do. A good cook can take cold food from the refrigerator at one time, put hot food on the stove at another time and make it all come out at the same time, so everyone has a good time.

As Martha tries to pull off the task of feeding 13 hungry men it wasn't going very well. The whole thing smelled more like a burnt offering than a dinner. Finally she looked to her sister for help, but where does she find Mary? Sitting at Jesus' feet. Perturbed, Martha came back to the kitchen as burned up as the dinner.

Then the volcano inside of her exploded. She stormed into the living room, went up to Jesus and said Lord don't you care that I have to make the meal by myself? Tell my sister to come and help me. I'm sure she thought Jesus would come to her defense and send Mary scurrying into the kitchen. But Jesus responds to Martha as a parent correcting a child's temper tantrum. Martha, Martha, one dish would have been enough. Mary has chosen the good part and it cannot be taken away from her.

Now you don't have to go through seminary to understand this story. You don't have to take a course in hermeneutics to discover who gets the low marks and the high marks. We all know that Martha made the bad choice and Mary made the good choice. We all understand. The difficulty is I still find myself on Martha's side.

I have a secret sympathy with Martha because Martha is realistic. Remember when Lazarus her brother died Jesus was four days late to the funeral. When he finally showed up they took Him to the cemetery and when Jesus asked them to roll away the stone, Martha replied Lord by this time he stinks! Not very couth, but pretty realistic. Martha was realistic to know that if you're going to get a dinner for sixteen

people, someone's got to hustle to get it done. Sitting around at anybody's feet won't get the food prepared.

Of course all the devotional commentaries praise Mary the sweet sister who sits at Jesus' feet and reads the Bible. Martha comes across as a non spiritual woman. John 11 indicates that Martha was theologically astute and spiritually deep. Furthermore, But if you think about it, if it wasn't for the Martha's of the world, nothing much would get done. If it wasn't for the Martha's in the pews nothing much would ever happen in the church. Years ago Kipling wrote a poem called the sons of Mary.

The last two lines of the poem read like this: The sons of Mary sit at Christ's feet and hear the words of their Lord, and as they casts their burdens onto Him, The Lord takes their burdens and places them on Martha's sons.

There are two kinds of people in the world. There are those who when they have a sick friend that say I'll pray for you. And there are those who when they have a sick friend say I'll pray for you and bring you soup. Martha is the second kind. Martha wants to take care of Jesus and His disciples. You can't give Martha low marks for serving. The previous story is the Good Samaritan where the basic lesson is help anyone you can. Martha recognizes Jesus and His men have been on the road quite some time and are hungry. For her service Jesus does not fault her.

But she has lost sight of what is important. & this is usually accompanied with an attitude. Martha's life verse might have been; If it is worth doing---it's worth doing well. This motto has been the death of many who suffer from this perfectionist attitude.

Early in my ministry I used to ask my wife: Let's have so and so over for dinner, which was easy for me to say because I do not cook. But my wife is one of those people that lives by the motto if it's worth doing---it's worth doing well. Which means, thoroughly cleaning the house, getting out the china, preparing an elaborate meal, all which takes an incredible amount of time and work. Subsequently, we had few people over and missed out on lots of fellowship. The fellowship is the real issue, not the food.

While most of us appreciate Martha as the one who makes it happen, Jesus redirects her focus on to what is really important, listening to Jesus. Jesus says Martha, Martha; you are worried about too many things. What Jesus is saying to Martha is a simple meal would have been enough. It is not worth it to get all stressed out and angry.

A friend shared that before the Christmas meal all the children would be excited, singing carols enjoying the holiday spirit, until mom would burst in screaming and ordering people around, so when it came time to sit at the Christmas table---the Christmas spirit was gone. Ever been there? Hospitality is nice, but if it comes at the cost of your spirit, soup and sandwiches are better.

Which brings us to a recent holiday at the William Lewis household. We had guests visit for a week and when they left, my wife asked, did you have the spiritual conversation we talked about needing to take place? Hmmm, no I never got the chance I had two funerals and the trip to the museum, the big meal

the shopping sprees...I never got around to the ministry that we had planned and our friends so desperately needed. The superficial took precedent over the more significant.

This is where Jesus' affirmation of Mary guides us in our preparation for the season. Sitting at Jesus' feet is more important than getting the atmosphere all ready. Do you recall Martin Luther's ridiculous statement, Lord I am going to be busy today so I am going to spend 3 hours in prayer instead of 2? Huh?

How many of us are too busy for a quick devotional read...and yet we are drying up on the inside because our lack of time in Christ's presence. While sitting in Christ's presence might appear lazy, it is the only way to really slow down long enough to glean the deeper issues of life.

Sometimes being busy serving others is a subtle way of creating a distance between you and others. A way to be needed and yet excuse yourself from ever being vulnerable, never having to invest the inner part of yourself...1) it is a quiet way to keep people from seeing the real you and 2) avoiding personal introspection because after all I'm doing all this for others...3) maybe even a ploy to hide from God working and serving others so you don't address the areas of growth we need.

I've noticed in the past when I've been busy with Christmas & church preparations at the expense of my devotional life there is an emptiness to Christmas...serving others, but nothing for my soul which is the entire purpose of the Christmas celebration embracing our relationship with God who came to be with us.

As we enter the Christmas season life goes at a dizzying pace...it is emotionally, spiritually, physically, relationally challenging. There's a new reality in our world—multitasking. Like last night I'm working at my computer working on my sermon, listening to music in the back ground, counseling a friend on the phone, eating some leftovers, while watching the football game on the T.V....this is multitasking. I remember when Elijah was at Chuck E Cheese playing a video game with one hand while in the other hand he was playing his game boy. He needs to learn how to focus on one thing at a time! Where did he learn this lack of concentration from?!

We try to address the frustration levels in our marriage, deal with the changes at work, face big financial decisions, and weigh our retirement options. Most of us are dealing with multiple emotionally draining issues. Then Christmas comes along and like Martha Jesus drops in for a visit.

What is your typical response to the chaos of life? Do you go into fix it mode? It is here when God breaks into our lives and whispers Psalm 46:10 in our ear--Be still and know that I am God.

God not only tells us to stop, but He tells us how to stop...know that I am God. Run these thoughts through your mind: (His love for us, His availability and interests in us, the fact that He is in control of our lives, etc.). While you might think God is telling us to do the impossible (slow down) don't confuse being still as being inactive. No it means in the midst of your stressful schedule engage God. Let me illustrate. As a past boxer and present boxing coach as you would assume I am a fight fan. One of the most amazing events I ever witnessed was the Tyson Holyfield fight—you might remember that was the time Tyson bit off more than he could chew. While the fight was exciting, the prefight moments were an

incredible contrast. In Tyson's locker room there were militant Muslims screaming and smashing their fists into the steel lockers.

But in Holyfield's locker room he was all alone with praise music playing and Holy field stood there with his eyes closed and his palms open to receive the Holy Spirit. Here he is about to fight for the heavy weight championship against a demon and what is he doing? Being still and engaging the presence of God—focused on the One who empowers him.

It is time with God that energizes us for the task at hand. Let's get back to Martha, yes; I still want to come to Martha's defense.

St. Francis of Assisi used to do ministry among the pirates and prostitutes serving the meal of God's grace to the spiritually starving people. In contrast above them on the cliffs the monks kept themselves removed and unstained from the world.

There it is proof Martha's are more important! Don't be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good!

But before we judge the Monks too harshly they were the ones who kept the written word copied and safe during the dark ages...so that you and I still can read the pure scriptures today!

So let me clarify, sitting at Jesus' feet is more than just seeking a blessing, it is from there that Christ moves through us, so that after we experience Him, others might do so through us as well! Isn't this the greatest Christmas gift you can give to others—the presence of God.