

SERMON: "Doing the Better Thing, Listening" – July 22, 2007
Text: Luke 10:38-42

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is making the final journey of his life to Jerusalem. We are to take particular notice of his teachings, as if they are the most important, the last ones before his death. The important teaching has to do with last week's lawyer question, "How do I inherit eternal life?" The answer to that question has to do with loving God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself. This is the disciple's life the balance between loving God and neighbor. Last week's lesson was about loving neighbor. The lawyer lived an unbalanced life by spending all his time in learning and asking questions concerning faith, that he forgot the doing part of loving his neighbor. In the story of the Good Samaritan, an unlikely disciple, a Samaritan, told the lawyer that action in loving his neighbor was missing from his life as a disciple.

This week's lesson concerning Mary and Martha is about loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In this story Martha was so wrapped up in the doing of hospitality that she lived an unbalanced life by forgetting to make time in loving God by listening and learning from our Lord. The one who modeled that kind of life was again from an unlikely disciple, a woman, her sister Mary. Let's take a closer look at today's lesson in Luke to learn more about this other commandment to love God, and how it leads us to live a balanced life of listening and doing.

In our busy, hurried, doing, doing, doing lives, including pastors, I think we identify with Martha all too well. She is extending hospitality to Jesus and his disciples. Having 13 over for dinner is enough, but because earlier in Luke we find out that he has seventy disciples, it may have been a huge crowd that Martha was hosting for dinner. There was the house to clean, food to prepare, and the tables to set in feeding this crowd. Martha is the head of the household and so coordinating was her responsibility. It seems with all that needed to be done, she needed Mary's help. There sat Mary at the feet of Jesus, not place for a woman. To sit at the feet of Jesus was the position of a student or disciple of the Master, this position was only to be held by men, the Jewish tradition at this time of history. Only men could learn the Torah from the Master teacher. How dare Mary make time for such things that don't pertain to women, hosting a meal and extending hospitality to visitors was a woman's role. Martha needed all the help she could get, and her right hand person to come to her aid was sitting and listening not helping with the responsibilities.

It is interesting to note how in a very short story of just five verses, that Martha talks a lot about being overworked or working hard. In the Greek text of the New Testament she even uses a special word for this work. She talks about her diakonia. Isn't that interesting? Not only is this the source word for someone who is a deacon in the church, it is the root word usually translated as ministry or service. Don't we sometimes feel frustrated when we're engaged in some ministry or service on behalf of the church and we find ourselves wondering why so few are helping us?

Whenever the question, “Why so few are helping?” is asked, the answer we want is one in which those on the sidelines join the game. The answer we seek would result in having too many, not too few, volunteers. The answer we seek is that everyone will bear a fair share of the load for the sake of all. We don’t expect Jesus to say, on behalf of those who aren’t helping, they have chosen the better part. I don’t think Jesus would always praise those who refuse to help. Not at all, but in this instance, at least in terms of Mary’s choice, she is the apple of Jesus’ eye. Jesus even says that this part will not be taken away from her. Jesus infers to Martha in his remarks to her. Mary may look distracted to you, but you are the one who is really distracted with all your worry and flurry of activity in hosting.

Mary, this unlikely disciples, models for Martha and for us busy, hurried, watch watching, and twitter patting people full of ministry and service projects to first and foremost, spend time at our Lord’s feet listening and learning. This is modeling how to love God, to give God each day our full attention, time away from responsibilities and distraction. Not to talk God’s ear off, although God will listen, but to listen and learn from our Lord, Jesus. Giving Jesus our attention and being fully attentive and receptive to whatever Jesus is wanting to reveal to us. The balance of doing ministry is listening first to the head of our church and faith, Jesus Christ.

So all of us now are going to now sit in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ and listen.

I know the pews are hard, find a comfortable position to sit still. I ask that you keep your hands on your lap and palms up and open ready receive the message for you from our Lord. I invite you to close your eyes. Now repeat in your mind this verse from Psalm 46: "Be still and know that I am your God." If you find your mind wondering to the list of things you have to do, gently bring your mind to repeat the verse "Be still and know that I am your God." In here repeating the verse and bow out all the distractions that keep you busy but not listening to your Lord.

Silence:

Picture yourself in your favorite place. (silence)

Now picture yourself sitting at Jesus feet. You have been invited by him and you are now there to listen. (silence)

When someone and something comes to pull you away from this sacred place keep your eyes on Jesus. Keep listening to his words. Jesus is speaking to you. What is he saying?

Silence

It is time to come back to this place. Say your farewell greeting to Jesus and then open your eyes. Move your hands, wrists, shoulders, and feet. Now take the bulletin and turn to the "Note" page. Write down what you heard Jesus tell you. Take it home with you. Look at it daily.

Author Fredrick William Faber wrote this about our frantic life styles. "God is always whispering to us, only we do not always hear, because of the noise, hurry, and distractions which life causes as it rushes on." We can do and do but if we don't listen first, we won't know what kind of things to do. Our first act as a disciple is to listen to our Teacher, Our Lord, Our Healer, Our Giver of Life.

Today we are commissioning people of action as they go on mission trip on behalf of Christ's church. For those going, I charge you before you get busy with your good works, take time to listen and learn in order to equip you for the day.

Now for all of us, as disciples we are called to daily sit at Jesus' feet for a while. Know the freedom that comes from letting go of all that has to be done, and listening for the voice of God. Discover the balanced life of a faithful disciple, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and then go and love your neighbor.