

**“One Thing Is Necessary” (Luke 10:38-42)**

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. The story in today’s Gospel about Mary and Martha with Jesus is very popular and appears to be one in which Martha gets all the bad press. This can be a little confusing. After-all Jesus had already taught in Luke 9 (v 4) and 10 (vv 5-7) that missionary travelers would be provided for by their hosts. In Luke 10:7 Jesus tells his disciples, “*And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house.*” It seems that Jesus is basically doing what He taught his disciples to do when we read in Luke 10:38: “*Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.*” In effect this was exactly according to script. Martha was doing a fantastic good work. Imagine being able to host the Lord Jesus Christ! To give Him rest, food and drink.

Martha was focused on this task. It was a wonderful task. She wanted to help Jesus. How can this possibly be a bad thing? Not only does it appear that she was being obedient to Jesus’ prior teaching about missionaries being welcomed, she was serving Christ who had said (as recorded in Matthew 8:20) that He didn’t even have a place to lay His head. Martha wanted to make sure that the task of hospitality would be done properly and be made more efficient. She was flabbergasted by the fact that her sister Mary was not helping. There was work to be done. Jesus had taught about this very scenario. It was now their call to be faithful in supporting Him and serving Him. So Martha was bold and interrupted Jesus speaking to Mary and said as recorded at verse 40: “***Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.***”

Martha had been missing something that is easy for us to miss as well. Let’s back up. There is no question that Jesus taught about how the disciple missionaries were to be received. They were to look for and expect kind souls who would open their homes and replenish them; take care of them and keep them strong in their missionary journey. These people would take care of God’s servants! This is -- for example -- what all of you do for me here at Saint Paul’s. You provide generous hospitality for me and my family! As a result, I get to conduct what I consider the best work in the world as you, God’s people, bless us in so many ways! It doesn’t get any better than that. However, there is a goal behind taking care of the servants and missionaries of God. That goal is not simply to give you the opportunity to do good in caring for others (which is obviously very important), but there is an even greater goal which is ***to receive the message of the saving Gospel from those missionary servants of God.*** Thus Jesus never contradicted Himself.

The disciples were most definitely blessed to have a host take care of them, but even more *the host was blessed, because the host was supposed to become a guest; and the guest was supposed to become a host. The missionary would become the host of God’s Word proclaimed in order to feed the souls of those providing lodging and food. That is, the missionary was the spiritual host giving spiritual food; while the person giving lodging was the physical host giving physical food.* They would be blessed to receive the missionary by receiving the Word of God from that same missionary. In this way, the Lord continues to accomplish the Great Commission, and equips His Church more and more with the saving Gospel.

All of this is to say dear Christians that the first goal in providing hospitality for the servant of the Word is to hear and receive the Word of God! Martha missed this. And in our sin, so do we. This Gospel is very revealing about our basic problem. I want to share three particular words with you from this Gospel in Luke 10:

1. The first word is towards the beginning of verse 40. The Word of the Lord says, ***“But Martha was distracted...”*** The original word means to be “dragged around.” Here she was doing a good work, but she was distracted and upset while she did it. Just look at Mary! Perhaps Martha wanted to do what Mary was doing, but this work had to get done! She had lost her peace even while doing a good work!
2. The next two words are Jesus’ diagnosis of Martha recorded at verse 41: ***“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled...”*** The word “anxious” is taken from a base word that means “a part.” That is, the word emphasizes division. There is so much going on, that the mind is divided. You are thinking about this, thinking about that, trying to do this, and trying to do that. You have a divided mind; a mind going in two dozen directions at once and as a result, your peace is gone. You don’t know how it’s all going to get done. You take on too much! As a result of this anxiety, the next word is “troubled.” It means to be “tossed about”...you can easily feel out of control as if in a storm.

These words describe our sin. Jesus comes to us and our first inclination is all of the work that we must do for Him. There is so much to do; so much to get done. So we start working and we become more and more divided. We are now doing so much and convincing ourselves that it is all for the good that we are exhausted and divided within ourselves. When this occurs, even people who are extremely dedicated to the Lord can lose their joy and peace. They are so divided that they feel tossed around and out of control. And frankly they can forget the whole reason for following the Lord to begin with.

So Jesus had to lovingly correct Martha. There was a priority to be had. She had to stop and she needed to do what Mary was doing (Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to His teaching, v 39). At the end of the day, Jesus calls all of us to get back to the proper order: He must be the host. We must be the guest. He must feed us. We must be fed. The one thing necessary is to receive the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ. The highest priority is to be fed with the Word and Sacrament. And if this one thing takes priority in your life dear Christian, then everything else will be kept aligned.

The Lord says in Matthew 6:33: ***“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of these things will be added unto you.”*** When I was in seminary, the late Dr. Robert Preus taught me about the beauty of the hymn we just sang: “One Thing’s Needful,” and I’ve come to love that hymn more than ever before. I love the hymn “Amazing Grace,” but I would

never know that God's grace is amazing apart from the one thing needful, the Word of Christ. I love the hymn "Beautiful Savior," but I would never know that my Savior is beautiful without the one thing necessary. I love to sing "How Great Thou Art," but I would never know God's greatness apart from His Word, the one necessary thing. With this one thing, this one necessary thing, everything else comes into focus and is properly known.

Through the Word of Christ, we exchange divided hearts and minds for single-mindedness and single-heartedness. We will desire more than anything the Word of Christ and in so doing -- by the grace of God through faith in Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit -- we will discover that when we have the Word as our priority, then we will have everything else we need! The Word of God that flows from Christ created the heavens and the earth; raised the dead and will raise the dead again; it had power to create your faith and has power to sustain it; and it has power to direct your life to do wonderful things in the Kingdom of God!

A few years ago I got to help my son and daughter in law move from Connecticut to St. Louis so that my son could commence his seminary studies. When we arrived to St. Louis we decided to celebrate our arrival by taking a cab to the old spaghetti factory by the arch along the river. We were amazed at what happened. The cab driver was a man named "Lugano." He's an African from Tanzania.

We had a wonderful conversation with a fellow Christian in a taxi cab. We were mutually blessed. First of all, he was very humble. When he found out I was a pastor and that A.J. was preparing to become one, he received God's Word from me. I became the host in his cab. I felt compelled to speak to Lugano's great hope that his 13-year old son named "Immanuel" would someday become a pastor. I shared Joel 2 and Acts 2 with Lugano to speak of how the Lord continues to raise up young men to catch the vision of God's fantastic revelation which points to Jesus as the Savior. I felt moved to give Lugano a cross to give to his son Immanuel.

Lugano insisted that he pick us up after our meal. He did and when he did he turned off his meter and proceeded to give us the greatest tour of the city of St. Louis I had ever experienced! Talk about giving my son and my daughter in law a welcome to St. Louis! When we got to the hotel, we held hands and prayed and then gave each other big hugs as we said goodbye. Part of Lugano's testimony was the many instances that the Lord had seemingly miraculously provided for him. This was no divided man; he was not anxious. The Word of Christ filled this man's heart as he could not quote God's Word enough in his regular conversation. He had discovered the one necessary thing in life!

Jesus also told Martha that Mary had chosen "the good portion" and that it would not be taken from her. It was a play on words. Martha was preparing the "portions" of food, but Jesus' food was eternal food. It doesn't spoil, it doesn't fade; it lasts forever. This is the food that Jesus gives to you: His Word, His body and His blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Take this Word and it will never be taken from you! Hold to this Word and you will be blessed! Make it yours and the peace of God will be stronger than your anxiety.

It is true that Christ lived and died and rose for you that you would be saved, but it is also true that the Lord is actively giving you His Word today! He is still saving you! He is keeping

you saved! He does this by giving you the one necessary thing because His Word gives you Himself!

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:22-25: *“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.’ And this word is the good news that was preached to you.”*

Thanks be to God Christian! God has given to you the one thing necessary: the Word and with that Word, you have Christ, and with Christ your being dragged around, anxious, and troubled by sin has been replaced with His awesome love and mercy so that your division has been covered with just one thing...*Himself* and He is all you need!