

Mary and Martha

[Luke 10:38, John 11:17-27](#)

Mary and Martha were sisters of Lazarus. In a time when women were to be part of the background, Jesus turned tradition around. Women were never allowed to listen and learn from teachers or rabbis, yet Jesus encouraged women to listen and understand his teachings. Women were to be silent, ensuring that the household preparations were in order for the men. Jesus encouraged women to set those chores aside, sit with the men and learn. Jesus was quite the radical.

In the first passage of Luke, we find Jesus and the disciples traveling. In one village a woman named Martha opened her home to the visitors. As part of Jewish custom, Martha then proceeded to do all the behind-the-scenes preparations necessary for receiving guests. Often travelers would stay overnight with

their hosts, hence there must have been food and lodging preparations, care for the travelers' animals, etc. Martha accepted all of these chores when she opened her home as part of the role of being a good host. She also anticipated the help of her sister Mary.

Picture the scene if you will. The house was full of guests. Other people wandered in and out listening to Jesus' teachings. Martha was scurrying about attending to the details of being a good host, becoming more and more stressed out by the moment. Martha was most likely harboring an underlying loathing toward her sister who was not lifting a finger to help her. She finally snapped and asked Jesus to intercede, for surely he could see that Mary was not performing her duties as expected. At that point Jesus turned hundreds of years of tradition completely on its ear! Jesus was concerned with

Martha's soul. While Martha was scampering about focusing on all the details of physical well being for her guests, she was neglecting her own spiritual well-being.

I remember one Christmas holiday in particular. Every year my family comes to our home Christmas night to celebrate together – usually there are about 16-20 people. This particular Christmas I started to get sick with a cold. I distinctly remember getting angry that everyone was coming to spend Christmas with us. In spite of the fact that this was a joyous occasion, all I could see was all the work I had to do and that fact that I felt lousy. It was then that God gave me a bit of a reality check through my husband. He reminded me that family time is sacred. Others traveled great distances to come and spend time with us together, and each of them was willing to help with the preparations. I wasn't in this alone, and the 'therapy' I received

from family fellowship was priceless. From that Christmas on I learned to lighten up and enjoy the day.

Jesus recognized Mary's thirst for knowledge. Mary was listening and absorbing Jesus' teachings. Mary was taking time to feed her soul. Jesus said to Martha, "Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her." I'm sure that from where Martha was working in the kitchen she could hear Jesus' teachings, but she wasn't listening. She wasn't taking the time to focus on the word of God.

Do we need a time out sometimes? Do we need to step back and take a good look at what we have? God has blessed us so richly, yet often we can only see what we don't have or what still needs to be done. A co-worker of mine was painting the ceiling in a bedroom at the continuous nagging of his wife. He had almost completed the entire room with the exception of 1

last corner. His wife walked in, looked at that corner and said, “This looks good, when are you going to finish the rest?” Mary was not neglecting her duties as a host. She was taking time out of her schedule to feed her soul.

At first glance it would appear that Mary had a much stronger faith than Martha. And yet when we read the second passage from the book of John, we see Mary and Martha again only this time they were mourning the death of their brother Lazarus. The sisters had sent word to Jesus that their brother was ill. After delaying two additional days, Jesus told the disciples it was time to return to Judea. At this point Jesus knew that Lazarus was already dead. When Jesus approached the village, it was Martha, not Mary, who ran out to greet Jesus. Mary stayed home. In this passage, we see Martha’s strength, courage and faith as she accepted that even in death Jesus could

show compassion and victory. In John chapter 11 verse 25, Martha stated, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” Mary was the one who was too distraught to leave her home until she was summoned by Jesus.

Can we compare our faith to that of Mary and Martha? At any given time we may see ourselves as either one. In the first passage, Mary strengthened her faith by listening to Jesus’ teachings, yet Martha’s faith was put aside by the busyness of daily life. In the second passage, Martha was able to express her faith in time of great sorrow and grief, while Mary saw her faith set aside as she focused on the loss of her brother.

Life presents many challenges. We may struggle to see God in our daily lives because we get caught up in issues of the day. How many of us, when one thing goes wrong, we wait for

the other two? Right, bad things happen in threes! We need to remind ourselves to put God first in all we do. We are His children. We may question why things happen to us as they do. We may even become angry at God for not answering our prayers the way we think they should be answered. It is in times of distress that when we call out to God and trust God to see us through, our faith will be refined and strengthened. One of the most famous scriptures is the 23rd Psalm that states, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.” That doesn’t sound like a stroll down a beautiful shade-covered path on a bright spring day. The valley of the shadow of death – yet God is with us even there.

I remember seeing God as an all-powerful being, but very distant just kind of watching over us. I now see God as a partner

in my Christian walk, helping me through the good and difficult times. Even when we are walking on rocky ground, each step brings us further along in our faith, strength and courage. I would like to read a passage of scripture from 1 Kings 19:11-15. Elijah had just defeated all the prophets of Baal in a tremendous victory, yet Queen Jezebel had promised to kill him so he found himself running for his life. (click [link to scripture](#)) Sometimes we need to be still and know that God is with us. Let us not be distracted by our every day difficulties and busyness. If we can put God first as our steadfast beacon, we will overcome and continue on our Christian walk with a renewed sense of accomplishment. This story was received from our bishop John Schol.

‘Liana walked down the church aisle under four ceiling fans and by two high powered wall unit air conditioners. A

virtual wind storm. An acolyte's nightmare. Liana skillfully and carefully made her way down the aisle without the light going out. I noticed as she walked she kept her eye on the light. That's it, I said to myself. As we keep our eye on the light, the light of Christ, we can make our way when the challenges are great.' Let us remember our faith and put God first in all we do. Amen.