

**Text:** Luke 10:38-42  
**Theme:** Being Mary and Martha  
**Minister:** Reverend Dele Agbelusi  
**Service:** Morning Prayer (with Baptism)  
**Date:** 21/07/2013  
**Time:** 10:30am  
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The story of Mary and Martha has a close relationship with the story of the Good Samaritan. In that story, the lawyer correctly identified the priority of the commands to love God and love one's neighbour. The Good Samaritan's story develops the meaning of the command to love one's neighbour and the story of Mary and Martha highlights the overriding importance of devotion to the Lord's word as an expression of one's love for God.

Jesus had three friends who lived in Bethany. He would occasionally stay in their home when He was in Judea. Lazarus, Mary and Martha were brother and sisters. They lived together in the same house which probably was owned by Martha. At least, Luke records that it was Martha who welcomed the Lord into her house (Luke 10:38). Bethany was located on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives on the road linking Jerusalem to Jericho. Remember that road again?

There are three passages of Scripture which mention Martha. They are Luke 10:38-42 when Jesus taught in her home while she busied herself preparing food for her guests; John 11:1-44 when Jesus raised her brother Lazarus from the dead and John 12:2 when Jesus visited her home just six days before His crucifixion. We find her busy again preparing food while her sister Mary anoints Jesus' feet with costly perfume.

## **Life's Distractions**

"She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me.'" (Luke 10:39, 40). Both Mary and Martha are disciples of Jesus. These two women deal with Jesus' visit in two different ways. It is certainly important to observe something just now: it was not an either/or proposition for them or for us. We do not have to choose between worshiping the Lord like Mary or serving the Lord like Martha. Neither does there need to be such a conflict between our physical or secular needs and our spiritual growth. Sadly, that is exactly what many believers end up with.

A careful reading of the context shows us that Mary had been in the kitchen with Martha until Jesus started teaching. Note Martha said that her sister had left her alone to do all the work. Earlier, Jesus spoke of those who do not receive the word because they are pre-occupied with the "cares and riches and pleasures of life" (Luke 8:14). Martha's distraction places her in this category. In my experience, when I do pastoral visit, bearing in mind that I have got very limited time to interact with

my host/hostess, an elaborate entertainment that will take my hostess away for 25 minutes preparing food for me and leaving me with 5 minutes to interact with her is unhelpful. I would rather have a cup of water and spend 30 minutes gainfully than staring at the ceiling for 25 minutes while Martha is very busy in the kitchen!

Martha was being distracted from her soul's needs by other things. The other things in this case are not bad things. Sometimes, even good things can fill up our lives to the point where we neglect our souls. God has not blessed us with our families, friends, jobs, abilities and other gifts to give us an excuse to abandon a close walk with Him. Without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Unfortunately, often when things get busy, the first thing to go is time with the Lord.

### **(vv. 38-40) Martha's appeal to Jesus**

**Do not let so many things worry you.** Martha is certainly a stressed out lady at this point in time. Her exasperation can be seen in the way she forms her question, "Lord, do You not care...?" I can well imagine her "boiling" for a time in the kitchen (where else would you boil?) before being emboldened to charge into the room in such a way. And certainly the Lord does care, but not nearly as much about the problem as Martha sees it, as He does about the real problem of which Martha is unaware. The Lord is more concerned about Martha's state of mind and priorities than He is about being served a feast later on.

Mary's sitting at the feet of Jesus was the usual posture of a disciple of any teacher in the ancient world. But disciples were usually male. So Mary must have been quietly breaking the rule that reserved study for males not females. Her sister Martha was not merely asking for help, she was demanding that Mary keep to the traditional way of doing things.

There are many people who become crabby and irritable in their service for the Lord like Martha was. It is easy to look at all we do and to criticize those who don't seem to do as much. **But Martha's real problem wasn't Mary; it was Martha. She had become distracted and had taken her eyes off Jesus.**

**Martha's frustration is typical of those who diligently serve with good intent, but forget to also sit at Jesus' feet.**

*"The Martha spirit says, if the work is done, is not that all? The Mary spirit asks whether Jesus is well pleased or not? All must be done in his name and by his Spirit, or nothing is done." (Spurgeon)*

### **(vv. 41-42) "Martha, Martha, the Lord answered..."**

We can almost sense the love in Jesus' voice as He said this. Martha did good - she wanted to serve Jesus; but she had not added the one thing [that] is needed.

In the following passages the Bible speaks of **one thing** which is essential:

*"One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple." (Psalm 27:4)*

*“When Jesus heard this, he said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’” (Luke 18:22)*

*“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13-14)*

## **The Necessary Thing**

**“...but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:42).** If you are aware that your good friend has a few days to live and he wants to pass on some information to you, what will be your priority if he has got a few minutes to spend with you – food or hearing everything he’s got to say? That good part which should not be taken away from her, very clearly was to sit at Jesus’ feet, and hear his word.

*“Imagine not that to sit at Jesus’ feet is a very small, unmeaning thing. It means peace, for they who submit to Jesus find peace through his precious, blood. It means holiness, for those who learn of Jesus learn no sin, but are instructed in things lovely and of good repute. It means strength, for they that sit with Jesus, and feed upon him, are girded with his, strength; the joy of the Lord is their strength. It means wisdom, for they that learn of the Son of God understand more than the ancients, because they keep his statutes. It means zeal, for the love of Christ fires hearts that live upon it, and they that are much with Jesus become like Jesus, so that the zeal of the Lord’s house eats them up.” (Spurgeon)*

- People say we need revival; we need to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His word.
- People say we need unity; we need to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His word.
- People say we need to win arguments; we need to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His word.
- People say we need to reach the world; we need to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His word.

***“If we would be strong for service in the strength that prevents distraction and unrest, we must know what it is to find time amid all the duties of life to sit at His feet as disciples.” (Morgan)***

Today, if we are too busy to commune with the Lord; to pray and study His word; to meditate on life’s purpose and to enjoy a peaceful, private time with Him, then there is something horribly wrong with our practice. If our walk of faith consists mainly of going to church and then on with life’s busy day, then we are not receiving of the goodness that the Lord has planned for us. And if we are so hassled by the routines of daily existence that we find ourselves lashing out at those we love as Martha did on that occasion, then isn’t that a good indication that something needs to be fixed?

Jesus had previously encouraged the idea of service among his followers, so he did not say that Martha’s role is unimportant. I suspect many of us could use a little of Mary and a little of Martha in our lives.

## A Balanced Approach to Serving Jesus

“So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him.” (John 12:2). Here we find Martha serving again. This time the purpose of the gathering is to have supper. The end of Jesus’ ministry is approaching, and it seems as if both Mary and Martha are far more aware of the fact than even the apostles. Mary anoints Jesus’ feet with costly perfume and weeps openly. Martha does the thing she evidently knew the best. She fixes our Lord a dinner for perhaps her last time. No complaint this time. The Lord is about to go to the place from which He had called Lazarus. But remember who we are talking about. It is Jesus, whom Martha had identified as the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus had identified Himself as the resurrection and the life. He had proven it by raising her brother from the dead. He would prove it again on the third day following His own death. He would live again!

One might say that this account from the life of Jesus shows us three types of those who say they follow Jesus Christ.

1. There are people like Mary: Those who know how to serve and *also* sit at Jesus’ feet.
2. There are people like Martha: Those who diligently, and with the best intention serve God, but without adding the *one thing* - a continued focus on Jesus - and it results in great frustration.
3. There are people who don’t do either. They are not even in the house with Jesus, for they are too busy with their own pursuits.

Where do you belong? Does Jesus know you and do you know him as your Lord and Saviour? You can have a new beginning today by opening your heart to the Lord Jesus and surrendering yourself to him – To save, to cleanse, to lead.