

Luke 10:38-42 'Martha - there is need of only one thing.'

Intro

I imagine that many of us have heard this story before

The story of Martha - the lady who welcomes Jesus into her home and busies herself with looking after her guest

And of Mary - Martha's sister - who does nothing but sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to what He is saying

And, like me, I imagine you have been asked 'Are you a Mary or a Martha?'

Not a bad question. It is useful to understand what makes us tick

How we work and how other people work

It's good to know if we tend to be more activist motivated when we are busy getting jobs done

Or if we are more contemplative energised by taking time to think and analyse and contemplate

Understanding ourselves and others and what makes us like we are helps in being the body of Christ together

Or, if you listened carefully to a sermon Pat preached a while ago, you may remember that within this story there is an example of radical social boundaries being crossed.

What we could easily miss from this story is just exactly how controversial Mary is being

2000 years ago in Jewish culture a woman's place was in the kitchen or sitting with the other women NO comment gentlemen! :-)

NOT sitting in the lounge with a man

And certainly not sitting at a man's feet

This posture, this way of sitting, was what men did when they wanted to be the student of someone

And if you sat at the feet of a rabbi - which Jesus was (A Jewish faith teacher and leader) then you were indicating that you wanted to learn from this person because you yourself wanted to also become a rabbi

Mary positioned herself as a would be teacher and preacher of the Kingdom of God by sitting at the feet of Jesus !

TOTALLY unheard of and totally unacceptable in the days of Jesus

At least up until this point!

So... both good things to think about

Firstly - Are you more of an activist or a contemplative?

Not because one is better or more important than the other

Not at all - both are necessary But because it is good to understand which we favour in our own lives

Secondly - see how Jesus turned cultural norms on their head once again

Not this time with children or with who is our neighbour that John preached about last week

But with the place of women and his affirmation that women too could listen and learn and be teachers and preachers of The Kingdom

But I would like us to think, this morning, about a third focus on this passage.

Whether we are like Mary or Martha but in a different way?

Are we like Martha worried and distracted by our tasks and duties?

Or are we like Mary and chose the 'better part' ? taking time to sit at the Lord's feet and listen to Him?

Are we like Martha worried and distracted by our tasks and duties and many other things from focussing on our Lord

Or are we like Mary and chose to spend time with our Lord, listening to Him and learning from Him?

### Distracted !

Vs 40 says that Martha was distracted by her many tasks

Martha had invited Jesus in to their home and was offering Him hospitality.

We don't know if it was just Jesus or whether some of the others who had entered the village with Him were also invited in

But Martha had offered out the hand of hospitality to Jesus, and possibly some of His friends

This was a significant part of the culture of that day

And maybe something that we need to re-focus on today

Hospitality and welcome are essential characteristics of being part of the Body of Christ

And, sadly, often overlooked

But hospitality loses something when the host or hostess is distracted

I hope that all of us have had the experience, at some time, of being on the receiving end of genuine, loving, hospitality

It is not primarily about the quality of the food

In fact, I would go as far as to say that food is secondary to genuine hospitality

It is much more about the person feeling safe and free to be themselves, accepted and appreciated for who they are

But, sadly, in our story today, Martha - the hostess - was distracted

She was distracted BY her many tasks

We can imagine what her tasks were - preparing food, getting the fire going in order to be able to cook, making sure everything was clean and ready

But she was distracted BY her many tasks

I wonder then what she was distracted FROM?

She was busy getting things ready

She was frustrated by Mary leaving her to get on with it all on her own

She was even judgemental of Mary for the choice she had made

And maybe, I suspect, frustrated with herself for being caught up with the tasks and not being with Jesus PAUSE

Do you ever get frustrated with yourself for being caught up in doing something when you would rather be doing something else but you just can't help yourself!

Maybe that's just me

- Becoming resentful that others are having a laugh and joke when I am busy finishing off some task?

- When I am meant to be answering emails I gaze out of the window at people walking past and get frustrated that I am sitting behind my desk

- When I am writing my sermon I sometimes get frustrated that I have left it to the last minute again

Listen to what Jesus says in response to Martha's accusation and demand

vs 41 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part.'

See how Jesus challenges her worry and distraction rather than her business  
Mary was totally devoted to listening to Jesus and learning from Him  
Martha had lost her devotion which could have been demonstrated through her hospitality and become worried and distracted.

Mary's total devotion to spending time at the feet of her Lord, listening to Him and learning from Him meant that everything else she did would flow from that  
Martha had wanted to serve her Lord too but had become distracted and worried and so was working from a place of frustration and judgment rather than love and devotion

So now how do you answer if I ask the question  
Are you a Martha or a Mary in terms of distraction or devotion?  
I think this story offers us much more than thinking about whether we are activist or contemplative  
It does much more than challenge the social norms of the day  
Although both of these are good things to think about  
I think it calls us to remember again the one to whom we are called to follow, the one from whom we can learn, the one for whom we serve

Martha was distracted BY her many tasks  
I asked what she was distracted from?  
And I think the answer is she was distracted from the devotion to Jesus that Mary showed by positioning herself at the feet of her Lord and listening to all that He was saying.  
It doesn't matter if we are activist or contemplative male or female old or young rich or unemployed black or white  
We are all different, all unique but equally loved and important to Jesus and to the body of Christ.  
What matters to Jesus is our devotion to Him. That we take time to sit with Him, to listen and learn from Him so that everything else flows from that in a non distracted way.

At the end of our worship together this morning we are going to sing  
Be thou my vision  
The words of the first verse go  
Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
Naught be all else to me save that thou art

What would it mean if Christ were our vision? It would change our lives, because seeing the world through Christ's eyes would cause us to love as Christ loved. It would cause us to focus less on getting the things that we want and more on giving what we can to help others. It would cause us to care less about other people's opinions and more about the direction that God would have our lives to take.

We can only have Christ as our vision if we spend time with Him, sitting and listening to Him  
It doesn't mean, that for the activists amongst us that we have to stop doing  
But it does mean, that having spent time with him we can 'do' without becoming worried and distracted

The final 4 lines are  
Christ of my own heart, whatever befall,  
Still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

No matter what happens, or what woos my heart please let me see all things through the filter of You, for You are Ruler, Leader, Lover, Saviour, My God.

Listen again to the words of Jesus to Martha but substitute your name for Martha  
'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part.'

And when we sing the final Hymn together, may it be a prayer that Christ will be our vision and Lord of our heart.

Amen