

A Time to Serve and a Time to Sit (Communion Meditation)
Luke 10:38-42

Poor Mary. She gets fussed at in the Bible and fussed at through history, all because she sits at the feet of Jesus. Jesus likes what she does, but many others do not.

Including her sister Martha. Can't you just hear those dishes rattling in the background, Martha's noises of exasperation while she does her many chores, for after all, a woman's work is never done, while Mary
. . . just sits there, at Jesus' feet.

Jesus is friends with both Mary and Martha but it is Martha he gently chastises, offering the opinion that there might be something more to life than doing chores.

By the way, some Christian commentators have mentioned that Mary and Martha are both serving Jesus: Mary by listening and Martha by preparing their honored guest a meal.

The problem is, Martha is serving the Lord without taking the time to listen to him. She is so distracted by what must be done, by fulfilling the expectations of hospitality, that she misses anything and everything Jesus could offer her. Martha, when she finally talks to Jesus, tells him what to do: *Tell Mary to help me.* Meanwhile, by implication, Mary is just sitting there, presumably letting Jesus tell her what to do.

[Of course Martha will not be the last person to love Jesus so much that she finds it necessary to tell Jesus what to do, how to act, what to think.]

And now Mary. She is chastised by Martha. For sitting at the feet of Jesus when there is work to be done. Oh and by the way, just so you know, some modern-day feminist theologians chastise Mary for sitting at the feet of a man, for no woman should put herself in such a subordinate position.

Now, to a certain extent, I can see their point: the Christian faith has always, at its best, portrayed both men and women as equal before God. In Christ Jesus, there is no longer any male and female, as Paul puts it, and in Acts we find a woman, Priscilla instructing a male apostle, Apollos.

Unfortunately, such theologians miss the symbolic reason for sitting at the feet of a holy man: it is a symbol of being a disciple. Jesus says, "Mary has chosen the better part." Mary has chosen to be with Jesus, to listen to Jesus, to live as his disciple. Again, for a woman to sit at the feet of a holy man would have been shocking to the good religious folks of that day. . . but it was not shocking to Jesus.

But, as I said Martha is so consumed with her job, her life, that she has left no room for Jesus. An active life, no matter how busy, lived without reference to the grace and presence of Jesus Christ, is well, ultimately empty.

Martha at least in this moment, was living her life without reference to Jesus, who had come to her house. And we do not want to fall into that same trap. It wasn't that Martha did not care about Jesus; it was just that she was too busy with everything else.

But Martha is correct to this extent: we are all ultimately called to serve. But let us be careful to make sure that the stuff of serving: pots and dishes and serving do not become such a

distraction that we miss the “how” of serving and the “whom” of serving.

When it is time to serve, it is Christ we are called to serve. No matter who we are, we might well remind ourselves to put the modifier “Christian” before every thing we do and everything we are. If retired, we are a Christian retiree. If a student, a Christian student. If a policeman, a Christian policeman. If a father, a Christian father, if a driver, a Christian driver, if on the golf course, a Christian golfer. Well, you get the point.

But our Scripture also reminds us that there is also a time for us to sit. To sit again at the feet of Jesus. To soak in his love, his grace, his strength. To feel again his forgiving power. To hear again how he would have us to live. To find hope again in his words, in his presence, in his power, as we face difficult times. I expect that for Mary, too, there will come a time serve, because that time comes to everyone who loves Jesus, but for today, she has chosen the better part: taken the time to sit. At Jesus’ feet. As a disciple.

So, as we savor this bread and wine, may we, like Mary before us rest in Jesus’ presence, that we might find strength and comfort. . . and in due time, respond again to serve him, to follow him, to bear witness to him. Amen.