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Phoenix Community Church  
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Luke 10:38-42  
Genesis 18:1-10a

### Martha's Complaint

Imagining what Martha might say to God after the incident in today's Bible reading...

Dear God, that Jesus, I know you sent him to us, but sometimes he just makes me so mad. What does he expect? He teaches us that doing for others is important.

Just a few weeks ago he sent out the Twelve to preach without a thing – no bread, no money, no clothes, nothing. They had to depend on the hospitality of strangers.

And then, tonight, when I'm trying to show HIM hospitality, he embarrasses me in front of everyone, here in my own home.

All I'm trying to do is make sure the chores are done and everyone's been fed. After all, I want to be part of the conversation too, but someone has to take care of the house, feed the animals, and cook the meal for all these people. And God, you know those MEN out there aren't going to lift a finger to help me.

But Mary – my own sister – she lives here too. Why can't she help? She gets to sit and listen to Jesus teach and tell stories. She won't listen to me. I ask her for help and she just ignores me. Just sits there on the floor – doing nothing.

And when I ask Jesus to set her straight – he has the nerve to criticize me! Me! In my own home! Talk about being a good host – he's got a thing or two to learn about being a good guest!

He even had the nerve to say that Mary had made a better choice by sitting there and doing nothing. As if providing for all of these people isn't important at all.

Of course I'm anxious and upset, God! There's a lot to do and I'm the only one doing it.

Just yesterday I heard him tell that story about the Samaritan and explain how we should help each other.

And today it seems he's telling us that helping isn't important, that we should just sit around and talk. If I could only get some help, then maybe we could all enjoy the fellowship and conversation.

God, what I'm doing is important too. Jesus is always taking care of people and teaching us to love one another. I love all these people here. I'm just trying to do that by serving them.

So why do I feel so left out? Like I'm missing something? And no one seems to care? God, this service is what I have to give.

You have given so much to me – my home and friends – use what I have to give.

I know, God, that you love me and appreciate what I'm doing even if it sometimes feels like no one else does.

Help me to remember God that you care and that what I'm doing is important.

God, thank you for letting me get my frustrations out and help me to not be bitter or resentful when others don't give me credit for what I do.

Help me remember that the credit isn't as important as the gift. Amen.

## Mary's Silence

Imagining what Mary might say to God...

God, I didn't mean to make Martha angry. I know I should probably be helping her, but I just can't tear myself away from Jesus.

He's so interesting and his message of love means so much. And it's obvious his words come from you, God.

What am I supposed to do? I want nothing more than to follow him, to be one of his disciples. And how do I do that if not by first listening to what he's teaching?

I wish Martha could understand. But she doesn't get it, God. She's always working. There's always something more to be done. If it isn't chores here at home, she's off feeding the poor or something.

I know that's important, but if she just stopped and took the time to listen to Jesus with me, I know she'd understand why this is important, too.

Am I wrong God? Should I be helping Martha instead of listening to Jesus speak? I'm so afraid I might miss something important.

Preparing food honors Jesus, but aren't I also honoring him by being attentive to his words? After all, God, he's telling us what we need to know to be in harmony with you.

No, it must be ok. Jesus understands. He told Martha I was doing the better thing, didn't he? And that this – listening, loving you, God, and being in your presence – this was the thing that was most necessary.

I know he didn't mean that Martha's work wasn't necessary, but we need to spend time loving you first, right God?

And I'm sorry I didn't speak up. Now I'm sure Martha's mad at both Jesus and me.

I should have said something to her, but how could she embarrass me like that, asking Jesus to chastise me? I couldn't believe it.

I should have said something myself, but I just didn't know what to do. I'm thankful that Jesus didn't make me go and help, but I know Martha will be mad.

Dear God, I only want to know you better. Please be with Martha and help her to understand.

Help me to learn to follow what Jesus is teaching us. All I want is to love you, God.

Help us all to listen to what Jesus has to say so that we know how to drink the living water he keeps offering to us.

He says if we drink this living water we will be able to live in a new kin-dom where your love is the rule. O, God, please help me find this kin-dom. Amen.

## Need of Only One Thing

Both of our scripture readings today are stories that talk about hospitality...

In the story of Martha and Mary in the book of Luke, Martha has invited Jesus into her home and is busy preparing a meal and doing household chores. Meanwhile, Mary is sitting, listening to Jesus and not helping with the work that needs to be done. When Martha complains, Jesus takes the side of Mary, saying she has chosen “the better part.”

In Genesis, Abraham is resting under a tree in the hottest part of the day when he sees three strangers that he recognizes as God, or at least as representatives of God. And the first thing he does is ask them to stop and enjoy his hospitality.

After arranging for food and a meal, Abraham waits on the strangers while they eat and rest. The story ends with one of them promising that Sarah, Abraham's aged wife, will have a child in another year's time.

The two stories have some commonalities:

- Abraham and Martha have both invited a representative of God to enjoy their hospitality.
- In Genesis, Abraham receives an important message from God through the travelers, and in Luke, Mary is apparently hearing an important message from God as well, through the words of the traveler Jesus.

But don't these stories give almost opposite messages about hospitality?

The story of Abraham seems to be a model of how one is to provide for travelers. But when Martha tries to provide for her guest Jesus, he seemingly belittles the importance of what she is doing.

And this comes right after the story of the Good Samaritan where Jesus stressed compassion and hospitality as qualities of the kin-dom of God.

This also isn't the only time in the Bible that Jesus says something that seems to be in conflict with what we might have expected. And maybe that is the way it is supposed to be. Maybe Jesus is trying to stir up a little trouble and get the sisters Martha and Mary to think about the choices they are making.

Jesus' presence on earth, after all, points to the coming of God's realm and the reordering of what is customary and expected. So perhaps if we think Martha has been unduly criticized when she is just trying to do the right thing, then we need to allow Jesus to offend our sensibilities and maybe spend some time reflecting on what's going on here.

It is important that we note that Martha is only trying to do the right thing, to honor her guest by showing the proper hospitality. We should honor Martha's role.

But, obviously Mary is doing something important as well. Jesus even refers to it as the “better part.” We need to honor Mary's role as well.

So what lesson are we supposed to draw out of this apparent conflict between Martha's work vs. Mary's listening? Why is Jesus apparently down playing the importance of hospitality?

What is it that Jesus refers to when he says there is only one thing we need? Only one thing that is really necessary? What is it that Mary has chosen that Jesus labels the “better part?” If we stop and think about what Mary is doing, this better part, this necessary thing seems to involve listening, a seeking of God's realm, and a desire for discipleship.

In some sense, this seems to be a story that favors faith over works, and listening over serving.

It's a story, like last week's story of the Good Samaritan, that challenges our priorities:

- In the Good Samaritan, we are asked to place compassion for others above religious do's and don'ts.
- In this story of Martha and Mary, Jesus seems to ask us to place seeking over doing, listening over serving.

In some sense, the two stories almost appear to contradict each other.

However, one commentator notes that if the Good Samaritan is a story about loving our neighbor, then the story of Martha and Mary can be understood as a story about loving God.

Remember that the great commandment is threefold – first to love God, and then to love neighbor and ourselves.

If Mary illustrates the love of God, then we not only need to do what Martha was doing, showing the compassion of the Good Samaritan, but we first need to spend time loving God, doing what Mary was doing, listening to God's message and seeking God's realm.

Love of neighbor is critically important, but love of God cannot be forgotten. Worshiping, what we are doing right now, is vitally important to our relationship with God. As is the other ways in which we can listen to and seek God such as prayer or studying our Bible or other books, or talking with each other about our spirituality and beliefs, or developing other spiritual practices such as meditation.

I think it is also worthwhile to note that Jesus never tells Martha that what she is doing is unimportant, but perhaps he does call into question her priorities and her attitude.

In particular, I think we should note Jesus' admonishment to Martha that she is too anxious and upset about too many things that don't really matter that much. She lets the work of hospitality get in the way of her relationship with Jesus and with God.

And, how often do we do the same?

Don't we also too often let the busy little details of life, the household chores, the cleaning and dusting and cooking, or the things we have to get done for our jobs or running errands, shopping or going to the bank, or whatever the details might be...

Don't we often let all these little things, however important they might be, get in the way of our relationship with God?

Perhaps we get too busy or tired from all these things to pray,

or to come to church on Sunday evening,

or to attend Bible study,

or whatever it is we need to do to be growing closer to God.

We each need to take a cue from Martha and Mary and stop and ask ourselves:

are we distracted by too many things, by too many details, or are we taking the time to listen for God's message for our lives?

Are we spending enough time listening to God and seeking God's realm?

We needn't be so anxious and upset with things that really don't matter. Only one thing is needed.

Stop and listen.

Slow down and be in relationship with Jesus, with God.

Spend time loving God, beginning with listening for God's message to you.

For the better part is seeking God's realm.

But let us not forget to honor both what Mary and Martha represent in this story. Love both God and neighbor. It takes all of us, doing all of our parts, contributing all of our gifts, to make up the body of Christ, to create the kin-dom of God on this earth.

So let us sing out now, keeping the love of God and our neighbor not only in our hearts but also letting it shine out for the world to see. Let us ask God to weave us together as the kin-dom of God, in unity and love as God's beloved Children.

Amen.