

Bible Stories

She Chose Better

Luke 10:41-42

August 19, 2023

Jesus, Martha, Mary and Lazarus, were close friends – the best of friends, really – and Martha’s home was a place of refuge for Jesus. It was a place where he and his disciples could rest and relax.

Luke tells us that one day, while on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus popped in for a visit.

Martha was excited to see Jesus and welcomed him and the disciples into her home.

Mary was at home and no doubt she and Martha were both doing what all, good, Jewish women did – they were tending to the needs of the home – but when Jesus walked in, down went the Swiffer and the Hoovering was forgotten.

Immediately Mary sat down at Jesus’ feet to listen to what he was saying.

Everything else could wait because her friend was visiting.

While Mary sat at Jesus feet, **“Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.”**

I enjoy remodeling shows. One request homeowners make without fail is for walls between the kitchen and the living space to be taken down. The reason, most often given, is that the homeowners want to be a part of what’s going on. They don’t want to be stuck in the kitchen, while all the fun is going on on the other side of the wall. Being alone in the kitchen is a distraction from what they would really rather be doing – being social.

Could this be true of Martha? Could it be that her heart’s desire was to be doing what Mary was doing – sitting at Jesus’ feet – but she was distracted by her sense of duty and by the expectations of her culture? Perhaps, she too, lingered near Jesus for a time, but soon the weight of guilt at not doing what she **“should be doing”** drove her back to the kitchen.

Meanwhile, she did what we all do - she kept one ear open to what was happening on the other side of the wall:

Jesus said, **“blessed are the....”** Drat! The oven timer just went off!

Jesus said, **“take my yoke.....”** Drat! The pot on the stove just boiled over!

Jesus said, **“I am the Way, the.....”** Drat! The table has not yet been set!

What did Jesus just say? Drat! Drat! Drat!

Her hurt and resentment finally boiled over. She walked out to the living room, hand on hip, lips quivering, **“Lord,”** she said, **“don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”**

We think, **“Man was she bold.”** She’s all up in the God of the Universes grill, throwing around accusations, **“don’t you care?”** and getting a little bossy, **“tell her to help me!”**

Do you think she already knew the answer to the **“Don’t you care,”** question? I think she did. She knew the deep and abiding care Jesus had for her, but in the moment all she saw was that Mary had abandoned her and Jesus had allowed it. She allowed her hurt and frustration to override what she knew to be true.

We do that sometimes.....

And what of her demand, **“Tell her to help me!”**

Do you think Martha wanted Mary to be just as distracted as she was? Do you think she was jealous that Mary felt no pressure to be in the kitchen? Do you think she was bothered that Mary wasn't bothered by the cultural pressure to be the perfect hostess? Was she just mad because Mary was doing what she wanted to be doing? Do you think that she hoped Mary would feel shamed by her choice? Did she want Jesus to take sides?

Yes, I'd say..... And we do that sometimes, too.

We no longer live in the 1950's, but our culture still puts a high value on women being good hostesses. However, at my house I am what you might call a *"bad"* hostess.

"This is what we have in the frig, help yourself."

"You want a piece of pie? The plates are in the cupboard, help yourself."

I have a couple of cherished memories:

- The Saturday night Mo went into my kitchen, got out a pan and some eggs and cheese from the frig and proceeded to make himself an omelet. He did not ask permission, he just did it – because he knew he could.
- The Saturday night everyone showed up at my house in their PJ's because they knew I would be wearing my favorite Onesie Lounger.

Here is my philosophy: I want people to feel comfortable. You don't have to take off your shoes at the door – but you can if you want to.

And, truth be told, I am a bit rebellious.

If you want to wait on people hand and foot, please do so, but don't place those same expectations on me.

I am definitely a Mary and if you arrive at my house expecting a Martha you will be very disappointed.

And how did Jesus respond?

Did he storm out of the house – yelling, *"how dare you!"* as he went?

Did he glare at her because she had just interrupted a very important point?

Did he tell her to get back to where she belonged because his needs were more important than hers?

No. He. Did. Not!

I imagine that, while everyone else in the room might have been slightly embarrassed by her outburst, Jesus instantly rose from his place and made his way to Martha with his arms wide open.

"Martha, Martha," Jesus said, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better thing, and it will not be taken away from her."

Martha was out of line, but Jesus is not interested in embarrassing people, so his words were gentle, but there was reproof in them none the less.

I wonder if Jesus' words to Martha were also meant for the men in the room. No doubt their own unspoken expectations contributed to Martha feeling that her place was in the kitchen. No doubt Mary's eager presence would have been irritating to some of them (Judas perhaps?) Could it be that Jesus was pointing out to the disciples that both Mary AND Martha had just as much right to be at his feet as they did? I wonder.

There was nothing wrong with Martha's desire to show hospitality to her guests. The problem was 2-fold:

- She had bought the lie that her value was determined by her output. So worried was she that Jesus/His disciples would judge her value based on the quality of her hospitality that she missed what was most important – spending time with her friend.
- She chose to make her choices and the resulting stress and anxiety someone else's responsibility.

We do that sometimes.....

And what of Mary? Well, she won't always be a *"Mary"*

Tomorrow we'll find her, Swiffer in hand, going about her daily tasks – contributing to the household – but she will always have yesterday and she will treasure in her heart the day she chose to sit at Jesus' feet.

When Jesus stands at the door of your heart and knocks, what do you think he's after – what are his expectations?

Is he looking for a Martha or a Mary?

Does he want to be fed by you or does he want to feed you?

Does he want a servant or a friend?

Are you going to leave him at the door while you rush around straitening up? And will you become so distracted by what you think you should do that you forget that he's still waiting on the porch?

The answer is simple really. He just wants you.

You in your bathrobe and curlers.

You in all your messiness.

You. Just you.

There Jesus stands, takeout in hand:

Revelation 3:20 - Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.