

The Good Portion

Proper 11/9afterPent

Pastor Josh Frazee

Luke 10:38-42

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This morning, let's think about sensible portions. No, I'm not advocating a vegan diet, or that you should all eat meat. I'm not advertising for the next big diet revolution or fad. No, I'm not referring to the huge amounts given at restaurants these days. Our restaurant portions are so ridiculously large that people from other countries have tried them and laughed about them while doing video commentary on the popular website YouTube.

Think about the last time that you went out to eat, or the last couple. Were you able to finish everything on your plate? Did you have to get a doggy bag? Did you order one meal to split with a friend or spouse?

On the one hand, perhaps they just want to make sure you get your money's worth. On the other hand, why do we need two sides with a salad and bread when we just ordered a steak?

Apologies if you're starting to get hungry. But Jesus brought it up in our sermon text for this morning. He mentions a good portion, which appropriately references an amount of food. It is appropriate as He goes to stay with Martha and her sister Mary, and Martha begins to serve Jesus and His disciples food, while Mary seemingly ignores the food preparation, yet is still being fed.

Let's turn, then, to our Gospel text to see what food Mary is receiving that perhaps Martha is unknowingly ignoring.

Verse 1

“(A)s they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving.”

Like the disciples that Jesus had sent out earlier in Luke's Gospel, He Himself relied on the hospitality of others while He traveled. So, when Martha learned that Jesus was coming, she made certain that He and those with Him had somewhere to stay. This would have been quite an undertaking. Consider how many people you have come to your holiday celebrations. Which is busiest? Thanksgiving? Christmas? Easter? How many come that are expecting a meal? Or, if you go to another relative's house, how many go there expecting a plate? Are there more than twelve? Though the number Martha served is not specified, whether it is still the seventy-two from verse seventeen, or fewer, it likely included at least the twelve apostles in addition to Jesus.

Thinking a little longer on the idea, how many in your family assist with your holiday meal? No one other than Mary is mentioned in this account as one who could have assisted. Perhaps the disciples traveling with Christ included women who would have assist Martha, but Mary was content to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His teaching.

Can you imagine cooking for such a large crowd? What is more, can you imagine cooking for them all, all by yourself? Now, if you've ever been in such a situation, or if you work in fast food or a restaurant where you might have to cook or prepare meals for large numbers of people, you might be able to relate. Even further, if you were doing that work, and your coworker or someone else who was available to do the work was around,

but not assisting, you might have become much like Martha. But listen closely to Jesus' reply. He doesn't say that what Martha was doing was wrong. He said that what she was doing was of lesser importance.

Verse 2

“(Martha) went up to (Jesus) and said, ‘Look, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’ But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary.’”

How often do you find yourself anxious or troubled about many things? It may be that the things about which you are worried are appropriate. Like cooking for a large gathering, doing your occupation, fulfilling your vocational duties, or things like those take a lot of work and thought. Some stress on such things is normal, according to psychology. In fact, it would be a problem if you didn't stress at least a little bit over them. If you didn't stress over whether your children get fed, they never would, and that wouldn't be good. Or if you didn't stress over getting your speech prepared in time, you might not, and then you would be unprepared.

This is not to say all stress or too much stress is good. If you are stressed because you are wrapped up in a particular sin, you need to get out of it. If you stress over wanting more than you need, that also is not good. And if you stress out so much that it affects your health, at least for a prolonged time, you may not be trusting God to carry your burdens.

But that is not the case for Martha, or any Marthas among you this morning. She had a good and proper stressor. She was doing all the work, and her sister was not helping her. Some of you may get stressed out doing your job or jobs as well. That is good and proper. And it is also good and proper for you to expect your coworkers or spouses or family to help out, depending on what you're doing.

While it is good and right to do work to earn a living and to support your family, though, is there ever a Sunday morning where you wanted more assistance than you received? Do any of your coworkers go to church, here or somewhere else? If so, do you desire that they would have helped you instead of going to church?

If so, then you may be Martha in that way as well. You may be troubled and anxious about many things, but you may be missing the one thing which is necessary.

Verse 3

Jesus concludes His reply to Martha, “‘Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken from her.’”

While it is good to do work, it is also good, and in fact, more necessary, to come to hear God's Word, be it on a Sunday morning or a Saturday night. After all, “man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Deut. 8:3).”

All the restaurants get it wrong: the only sensible portion is one of God's Word. They can give you as much or as little, as unhealthy or as healthy of food as they want, but will still fall short. And the same is true for anything in this life. While some things may be more important than others, the good portion will always be listening at the feet of Jesus. Nowhere else can you hear the Good News about Christ Jesus' death and resurrection in its full truth and purity.

Only in the proper teaching of the Word do you hear the Law, how you have fallen short of God's grace, no matter how good you have been. The Law which tells you that you should have been coming regularly to hear the Word and receiving God's gifts. The Law which tells you to eat well practicing stewardship with the body God has given you. But not just the Law, but also the Gospel. The very same Jesus who went to stay at Martha's house at her invitation and who defended Mary for listening to His Word would go on from there, preaching and teaching and living perfectly. Then He would go to the cross of Calvary. He would take the sins of the entire world, including yours, and pay for them there. He would die to pay for them, and then He would rise again.

Yet in all of this, Jesus did not take away the Law, but the punishment you rightly deserve. Even today coming to hear God's Word is still the good portion. The Law tells us this is good, so the law itself is a good one. The problem was the punishment you and I rightly deserved for not fulfilling it. But now that the punishment has been paid, the Law teaching us to do good still remains. So do what is good the rest of the week, and then come and get your fill of the best portion here next Sunday, and the Sundays to follow, as one who believes in Jesus Christ, and Him crucified and risen for you. In Jesus' Name. Amen.