

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 6C - Proper 11C
July 17, 2022
Luke 10:38-42

The One Thing Needed

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42 ESV)

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

Last week, we heard a lawyer ask Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus told the lawyer to go and be neighbor to all, to show mercy to anyone in need. Today's Gospel follows on that and expands on it by contrasting Martha and Mary. Martha was more like the lawyer, and Mary, not so much. Martha is busy serving and showing mercy to Jesus. Mary sits at His feet, listening to Him. According to our Lord, Mary chose the better of the two ways, the one thing needed. So as we listen to our Lord this day, let us hear His words that we might learn the one thing needful.

Now, no one would say Martha was doing anything wrong. After all, it is good to welcome the Lord Jesus, the Savior of the world. It is good to serve Him with all one's strength. For Martha, this meant a lot of work - cleaning the house, preparing a meal, setting the table, and a host of other chores. And it was good that she do these things because showing hospitality was an important obligation of the day. To see that this is so, consider today's Old Testament reading. When Abraham saw the three visitors, he hurried to meet them to invite them to rest in his home. That meant bringing water so they could wash their feet, preparing a banquet for them to eat and drink, and giving them a place to spend the night. Yes, showing hospitality is good, especially when the guest is the Lord Himself.

And certainly Martha loved Jesus. That's why she wanted to serve Him the best way she knew how. She was concerned, though, only with what she could do for Jesus. Martha was convinced that the best way to worship Jesus was to give of herself - to offer her praise and adoration in the form of works and service. Oh, that we were as concerned to receive and welcome Jesus into our homes.

But something isn't quite right. While Martha scurries about with the preparations, her sister, Mary, sits at Jesus' feet listening to Him. It seems that Mary isn't showing proper respect for Jesus because she's not helping with the hospitality. She certainly doesn't seem to show much respect for Martha, letting her do all the work herself. Mary seems to be shirking her responsibilities.

So, Martha, tired of doing everything herself, came to Jesus and accused *Him* of Mary's apparent impropriety, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." And therein was Martha's problem. She was so wrapped up, absorbed, distracted by what had to be done and by what *she* was doing, she missed the best part of having Jesus in her house - letting Him serve her and by receiving His gifts.

What Martha was doing was good, but there was something better, and Mary had chosen it. You see, Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet listening to Him. And in this, we learn how to worship Christ aright. For Jesus "came not to be served, but to serve." So the highest worship of Christ is to let Him serve and to receive His gifts with joy and thanksgiving. That's what the Divine Service is all about, Christ serving us, forgiving our sins, and giving us eternal life. Our responding to His gifts with praise and thanksgiving is secondary and flows from His work, and thus, is still quite important.

Remember Jesus in the upper room. He got up, took off His robe, put on a towel, and began to wash the disciples' feet. When He got to Peter, Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet. To which Jesus replied, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (John 13:8). To worship Jesus aright is to let Him serve you - by washing away your sins and clothing you with His righteousness.

A short bit later, Jesus served His disciples, and us, by giving the Supper of His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins. He is the Host and we are the guests. He prepares a table before us with the best of food and drink as He gives Himself as the Meal. And in that Meal is the forgiveness of sins we so desperately need.

Later, He lay down His life on the cross and suffered the pangs of eternal death and the full weight of God's wrath. Thus He serves us by taking our place and suffering the punishment we deserve because of our sins. Then, by rising from the dead, He serves us with the assurance that we too shall rise to live with Him forever.

Yes, Jesus has gone to prepare a place for you, and like the good Host that He is, He has done everything that is necessary. He has even sent His Spirit to call, gather, and enlighten you concerning all this. And He will one day come to take you to be with Him to eat that eternal banquet which will have no end.

Until then, He has called and gathered you to this place to serve you. In this, His House, we sit at His feet and listen to Him. We hear Him tell us how much He loves us. We hear Him tell us that He forgives us all our sins. We hear Him say, "Take eat. This is My Body. Take drink.

This is my Blood.” We hear of the comfort and strength He gives us through His Word. This is where He is present to serve us as we need most to be served. For this is where our great Physician is present to pour out the oil and wine of forgiveness upon those beaten and left for dead by sin.

Yet, even here we get distracted from the one thing necessary. We may be distracted by our own thoughts and desires. We may be distracted by what we will do after the service and if we’ll have to stand in line at the restaurant. We may wonder if we’re doing enough to serve Jesus or our neighbor, or doing it well enough, if we’re concerned about that at all. Even as we sit at Jesus’ feet, we are burdened with the cares of this world. Our Old Adam continues to offer his own works as worship and service of God, if he even thinks of that at all. Yet, that Old Adam is to be daily drowned in Baptism so you can relish the truth that Christ has done everything necessary for your salvation and that He gives it to you freely.

So, my friends, relax. Sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to Him. “Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 ". . . For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matt. 6:31-33). And how do you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? You’re doing it now. You sit at His feet and listen to Him.

For our Lord very clearly tells us that the one thing necessary, or needful, has nothing to do with what we do, no matter how good it might be. Rather, the one thing needed is to sit at His feet and hear His Word. The one thing needful is to let Him serve you with His Word, His Supper, His forgiveness. The one thing needful is to receive His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, letting Him do all the work. And having done that, your serving Him and your neighbor will take care of itself. For as you serve your neighbor, you also serve Christ. For Jesus has taught us, “inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.” (Matt. 25:40). Such service flows from what Christ has first done for you and from the forgiveness and peace He gives you.

One of the Lutheran Confessions says, “Faith is that worship which receives God’s offered blessings; the righteousness of the law is that worship which offers God our own merits. It is by faith that God wants to be worshiped, namely, that we receive from him what he promises and offers.” (Apology IV.49). Nothing should keep us away from the one thing necessary for life.

God grant you such faith that you receive His blessing of forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation with joy. For that is the one thing needful, that is the true worship of God, and, by the grace of God, it will not be taken away from you. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener