

Luke 10:38-39 “Martha, The Energizer Bunny”

Martha's are the energizer bunnies of the church. They keep going and going and going. They store strength like a camel stores water. You don't appreciate Marthas until a Martha is missing and then all the Marys and Lazaruses are scrambling around looking for the keys and how to set the thermostats.

In the Gospel of Luke we find that the parables and teachings of Jesus were written for Christians in the 1st and 21st Century. Today we come to the story of Jesus visiting the home of Mary and Martha. This visit was chosen by Luke to be placed after the story of the Good Samaritan.

Luke has chosen stories and parables to answer this question... What is discipleship? What does discipleship look like? The parable of the Good Samaritan emphasizes “care and mercy for one's neighbor.”

Luke reminds us to listen and look to Jesus as the answer for “how can I obtain eternal life.” Through

Mary and Martha Luke reminds us that the most important thing is Jesus. He is the answer.

Martha, with her sister Mary and brother Lazarus lived in the small Judean town of Bethany, a few miles from Jerusalem. When Jesus was near Jerusalem, He would often stop and pay the trio a visit. They would ask Him to stay the night. If He had to keep moving on, at least He and His disciples would have a good meal and a place to sleep. It was a wonderful arrangement.

Jesus loved Martha's cooking and hospitality. It was Mary who poured expensive perfumed oil over his head when the disciples thought it should have been sold and the money given to the poor. Martha knew a lot had to be done and she wanted to make sure everything was just right. She began flying around the house putting everything in order for the Lord and his disciples. Martha is like a first century Martha Stewart. She is focused on the food, the house, the drink, the flowers for the table. Martha is so busy serving she completely forgets whom she truly serves.

Naturally, she expected her sister Mary to lend a hand with the preparations, but Mary is sitting with the men and listening to Jesus tell stories that speak about God. “To sit at the feet of Rabbi, meant that you were a disciple of that rabbi.” Mary is a disciple. Ahhh! “Jesus was a master teacher.” People were amazed and often said...He speaks with authority like no other...rabbi we know. Followers were drawn by the magnetic power of his words.

As the day worn on....Martha simply had no choice. Finally, she said to herself, “this job would be a lot easier if everybody pitched in.” Martha is distracted “from” the teachings of Jesus by her cooking.

“Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” Here is the real reason Martha frustrated.

Jesus then say “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed...” In other words Jesus’ response means: “Martha, one more plate of food is not that important. One more student who hears my words and implements them is more important than a good meal.”

Jesus is defending Mary’s right to become a disciple and continue her theological studies at His feet. This traditional Jewish separation of men and women in a multitude of scenarios including being educated is no longer necessary. For women and other oppressed people, Jesus turned upside down the accepted wisdom of the day.

When Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, He was proclaiming that God was a God of grace and mercy and those who follow Him must demonstrate the same actions.

By going out of his way to meet with the Samaritan woman at the well, and eat with sinners like Zacchaeus, and touching the sick, he extended the offer of God’s mercy. Instead of the message: “NO undesirables allowed, Jesus proclaimed: “in God’s kingdom there are no undesirables.”

Behavior and values that imitate Jesus are critical for a disciple to follow and practice. But behavior is simply not the way to get accepted by God nor a key for the gates of heaven. That was the problem with the Jewish lawyer who wanted a list of things to do so that he could enter heaven. Jesus said: “one thing is needful. I am the gate. I am the good shepherd. No one comes into the Father’s presence except through me.”

Well I don’t think it’s fair to malign Martha the way people often do. Martha was the one who asked Jesus to come to her home. I also note that Jesus didn’t say Martha was wrong in playing the good hostess. She was doing a job that needed to be done. Jesus, with His gentle refusal, made it perfectly plain, that while all of us have important things that need to be done, for the kingdom of God to grow and expand, there is only one thing absolutely needful Faith in Him.

When their brother fell ill, the women sent for Jesus. After Jesus arrived in Bethany, and when the sisters heard that Jesus had arrived, Mary stayed inside crying. Martha went out to greet Jesus. It was Martha, who even when confronted by death, kept her faith in Jesus. Here is how the conversation happened.

“Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. And even now I know that God will give you whatever You ask.” Jesus said: “Your brother will rise again.” Marth answered: “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies and who ever lives and believes in me will never die.” “Do you believe this.” Martha answered: “Yes, Lord I believe that you are the

Messiah, the Son of God who was to come into the world.” Jesus said... Let’s go to the grave. I have something to show you.

It was the Holy Spirit inside Martha that enabled her to believe in the Savior, to believe that He had the ability, the power to conquer sin, the devil and even death.

Christianity is a religion based on a person, not propositions or regulations. Christians derive their identity from a relationship with Jesus.

For three years the men and women followed their Rabbi.

For three years they listened to Jesus tell stories about things everyone could understand. He spoke about lost sheep, a marriage feast, a disobedient son. He was giving them a glimpse of the great grace of God’s love.

For three years men and women, disciples traveled with their Master. They saw him provide wine for a wedding, food for a hungry crowd, peace for frightened fishermen caught in a storm. They saw Jesus transform their world. Their understanding of God.

They also saw, in spite of absolute love and forgiveness how He had been hated and hounded.

How He had been betrayed by one of their own, beaten by Roman soldiers, mocked by the religious Pharisees, who refused to believe God would dwell in a human body and leave His beautiful temple in Jerusalem.

After the crucifixion they were frightened for their own safety and had taken refuge in a locked room, somewhere in Jerusalem. Only John, some women, including the mother of Jesus, Mary, Martha and other women who had become His disciples remained at the cross and saw the place where Nicodemus and Joseph had placed His corpse.

Two days later, early in the morning, several of the women, on their way to the garden tomb were met by angels who said: “I know you are looking for Jesus, He is not here, He has risen from the dead just as He promised.”

Years later when the Gospels were written the disciples shared very honestly, how the resurrected Jesus had come to the locked room where they were hiding. They wrote about how the resurrected, Jesus opened their mind and hearts to understand God’s plan for their forgiveness and eternal life.

To receive forgiveness a person did not have to journey to Jerusalem, offer sacrifices, and undergo purification rituals. All a person had to do was follow Jesus. For it was Jesus who on the cross transferred all of His holiness to all who believe in Him.