

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: July 11 – 17, 2016

Lectionary Readings: Genesis 18:1–10a; Psalm 15; Colossians 1:15–28; Luke 10:38–42

Prayer of the Day: “Eternal God, you draw near to us in Christ, and you make yourself our guest. Amid the cares of our lives, make us attentive to your presence, that we may treasure your word above all else, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.” Amen.

This week’s references come from the following sources. The appropriate resource will be referenced at the end of an entry by using the letters preceding each resource listed here.

- BPS: Brian P. Stoffregen’s commentary notes (Pr, Faith Luth, Yuma AZ) Crossmarks.com/brian
- DT: David L. Tiede, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: Luke*
- JG: Joel Green, *The New International Commentary: The Gospel of Luke*
- JS: John Shea, *The Relentless Widow (Luke)*
- L: Lectionary.com
- LSB: *Lutheran Study Bible*
- NISB: *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*”
- REB: Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*
- SB: *Serendipity Bible for Groups* (NIV version)
- SFB: *Spiritual Formation Bible* (Renovaré)
- SPMc: Stephen P. McCutchan, *Water from the Rock, Lectionary Devotional for Cycle C*
- WP: WorkingPreacher.org (Luther Seminary)
 - David Lose (2013), *Dear Working Preacher*, now President Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Penn.
 - Mikeal C. Parsons (2016), Professor and Chair of Religion, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.
 - Marilyn Salmon (2010), Professor of NT, United Theological Seminary, St. Paul, MN.
 - Elisabeth Johnson (2013), Pastor, Lutheran Institute of Theology, Melganga, Cameroon

Background information on this text:

- About hospitality: “Within the larger travel narrative (Luke 9-19), such stories as this revolve around the act of traveling and feature elements that are representative of the ancient Mediterranean custom of either hospitality or inhospitality. . . The language and setting of the story of Mary and Martha are reminiscent of the social custom of ancient hospitality, generally understood, in the ancient world, to refer to kindness shown to strangers.

The constant social context in ancient hospitality scenes appears to be travel. Hospitality was a highly valued and presumably widely practiced custom among pagans, Jews, and Christians. Hosts were expected to provide food, shelter, amenities, and protection to these traveling strangers, who sometimes turned out to be gods incognito.

Luke has a particular interest in issues of hospitality (Luke 7:36-46, 10:38-40; 19:1-9, compare with also Acts 9:43-11:3, 21:3-6, 21:7, 21:8-16; 28:6-10; 28:13-14). Often, as in our text here, the host initiates hospitality (Luke 7:36; 10:38; Acts 10:23; 10:22; 28:7).

This Lukan social ethic provides a solid foundation for Christian habits and practices both within the community (we have unlimited responsibilities to fellow believers) and with the world (we are called to provide Christian hospitality to those unlike us in nationality, faith, or ethnicity and assistance to those in immediate crisis). Christians are called to extend hospitality both as hosts and guests, and to fellow believers and non-believers alike. Such hospitality calls for personal and intimate engagement in a way that an insipid value such as ‘tolerance’ does not. We are *not* called simply to ‘tolerate’ or ‘endure’ those not like us; rather the ancient ‘Christian virtue’ of hospitality demands that we engage and interact with the Other, whether we are guest or host.” (Parsons, WP)

- “The Martha and Mary text (Luke 10:38-42) should not be studied apart from the lawyer's question and the parable of the Good Samaritan that precedes it (Luke 10:25-37). Significant contrasts are presented. The lawyer is told twice to ‘continually do this’ or ‘keep on doing this’ (28 & 37 -- present tense in Greek = continual or repeated actions) -- which could easily become the busy-ness of Martha -- especially when she uses traditional words for ‘service’ or ‘ministry’ -- *diakonia/diakoneo* both used in v. 40 (‘tasks’ and ‘do work’ in NRSV) -- in contrast to the ‘continual listening’ (imperfect in Greek = continual or repeated actions in the past) of Mary (v. 39). Looking at these stories together, it suggests that the contrast is not between doing and listening, but between being anxious and not...

Besides this contrast, in both stories there are unexpected actions -- a Samaritan who cares and helps (presumably a Jewish man in need); and a woman who sits and listens and learns as a disciple. First century, Jewish society, would **not** have expected either person to be praised for their actions.” (BPS)

- “Following so closely on the heels of the parable of the compassionate Samaritan, this episode reveals the nature of authentic hospitality. The welcome Jesus seeks is not worrisome, distracted domestic performance, but the attending to of this guest, whose very presence is a disclosure of the divine plan. No division between contemplative or active life can be found here, nor should we read here an admonition against the involvement of women in ‘service,’ a term Luke develops with reference to leadership in the mission (cf. 22:24-27; Acts 6:1-7). Indeed, within Luke’s world, the problem presented by this scene is not of a woman serving (which would have been expected) but of a woman choosing the role of a disciple; a word from Jesus is needed to underscore the propriety of this transformation of conventional roles! The distinction between Mary’s and Martha’s activities actually falls elsewhere; it rests on Martha’s ‘worrying’ an obstacle to authentic discipleship (e.g., 8:14; 12:22).” (NISB, 1875)
- “This episode is also very familiar, but considerably less popular (than the ‘The Parable of the Good Samaritan’), especially with women who have so often been told to fulfill their Christian vocation by **servicing** and then hear Jesus’ criticizing Martha’s concern for serving...The story also reflects the place that Jesus gave to being served. Although he has just praised the Samaritan for his great concern for human need, he has also instructed his disciples to expect little and not be a burden on a household (10:4-9), and he will later stress that his role as Son of man is to serve and not to be served and so is theirs (12:37; 22:27). Those who would become **anxious and troubled** over serving the agents of the kingdom are missing the object of the mission.

The good portion [**only one thing**], in this case, is the freedom to be a hearer. Mary has not even asked what she must ‘do to inherit eternal life,’ as if some task were the qualification. The kingdom is a gift, received by hearing the word in faith. The logic of what one must ‘do’ is simply misguided in such an instance. The opportunities for service will come in great abundance and challenge in due time.” (DT, 210-211)

- “Jesus’ relationship to Martha and Mary breaks social norms at two points:
 - Jesus visits women in their home, and Martha welcomes him into ‘her house’ (v. 38).
 - Mary sits at Jesus’ feet to receive his teaching, the posture of a disciple, a man’s place.

In recent years, some scholars have characterized this story as an attempt by the early church to define the role of women in ministry (Reid, 373-375). However, this story ‘is not about women; it is a passage on discipleship’ (Bock, 200).” (L)

Day 1

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Read through the entire Gospel lesson: *This week's story, like that of last week, is very familiar. Read it with an open mind to see what new insights God might place on your mind and heart. We suggest you jot down thoughts that come to mind as you read through the story today.*

- We invite you to journal as a part of your devotional/meditative time.
- Jot down any words or phrases that stand out to you.
- What do you think God might be saying in this story? Record this in your journal.

Day 2

Luke 10:38-39

³⁸Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying."

Background:

- 10:38-39 "In spiritual teaching, sisters symbolize side-by-side realities that are meant to be together. Separating them diminishes both. Therefore, although Christian history is fond of playing Martha and Mary against one another, the real task is to discover their proper relationship. It is not a matter of which one is more important; it is a matter of how they complement each other. The teaching of the text is about discovering their mutuality.
Martha's strategy is to make the two sisters one, turning Mary into a clone of Martha. She wants to collapse the two-tiered, integrated world of Mary-Martha into the one-dimensional world of Martha-Martha." (JS, 201-202)
- 10:38 "Martha welcomes Jesus and his group. She demonstrates the proper response of hospitality -- of setting food before the disciples." (BPS)
 - "Hospitality, sharing a meal in particular, is a prominent theme throughout Luke. This theme is featured in the travel narrative, with banquet parables (14:7ff; 15:11-32; see also 5:29), sabbath meals (14:1; see also 7:36), and the welcome offered to friend or stranger. In the narrative world of Luke, hospitality is multi-dimensional." (BPS)
- 10:38a "Jesus is **on his way** to Jerusalem, where he will die. Bethany is near Jerusalem." (L)
- 10:38b "Mary and Martha reside in Bethany (John 11:1-2; 12:1-3). It is here that Jesus will raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11:17-44). It is in this same house that Mary anoints Jesus' feet with perfume and wipes them with her hair (John 12:1-3)." (L)
- 10:38c "Presumably this is Lazarus' and Mary's home too, but Martha does the inviting and the invitation is to *her* home. In the various accounts of Mary and Martha, Martha usually takes the lead." (L)
- 10:39 "For the Third Gospel, to listen to the word is to have joined the road of discipleship (e.g., 6:47; 8:11, 21; 11:28)." (JG, 435)

- 10:39a “Mary assumes the lead here. While Martha busies herself with many tasks (a traditional female role), Mary sits at the Lord's feet and receives his teaching (a traditional male role).” (L)
- 10:39b “The word that Jesus speaks is elsewhere spoken of as the 'word of God' (5:1; 8:11, 21; 11:28), and 'his word' here is to be seen in light of this. Nothing less than a visitation of God is taking place (7:16; 19:41-44)” (Nolland, 606). (L)

Reflection Question:

- With which character in this story—Mary or Martha—do you identify? Why? Journal.
- Explain in your own words the roles each of these women play in this story.
- What do you think might be the implication for there being two sisters in the story? Explain.

Day 3

Luke 10:40

.⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.”

Background:

- 10:40 “Tannehill (*Luke*) notes:
In 10:5-9 receiving the messengers seemed equivalent to receiving the message. The story of Martha and Mary adds a qualification to that simple assumption: The task of hospitality may actually distract one from the message. Hospitality was very important to the early church, but this story cautions that preoccupation with arrangements can lead one to lose contact with the community's real purpose. This is especially apparent when a woman cannot graciously allow a sister to spend time listening to the Lord's word. [p. 187]” (BPS)
- 10:40 “melei = ‘**don't you care**’ or ‘aren't you concerned or anxious about’ -- Jesus is not anxious about the possibility of a late dinner or a simple dinner or even no dinner (he's already been through the temptation about living on bread only). This is also related to the word used of the Samaritan's and the innkeeper's actions of caring for the injured man (epimelo).” (BPS)
- 10:40 “‘be **distracted**’ (NRSV) is *perispaomai* in Greek, a word used only here in the NT. Perhaps most literally this word means ‘to be pulled from all directions’ -- *spaomai* = ‘to be pulled’ + *peri* = ‘from around.’” (BPS)
- 10:40 “Mary is sitting beside Jesus at his feet
Martha stands over Jesus (a more literal meaning of *ephistemai* ..., translated ‘come’ in NRSV). While this word can simply mean ‘to stand near or by,’ it also carries the idea of ‘to stand or be over’ and even ‘to oppose.’ There is a sense that Martha is opposing what Jesus and Mary are doing. Mary should be doing something else -- namely, helping Martha be a good hostess -- doing the proper ‘womanly’ duties.” (BPS)
 - “Mary was **listening** to Jesus' word or logic or message (*logos* in the singular) Martha **speaks** to Jesus.” (BPS)
 - “Culpepper simply states it: ‘Martha presumes to tell Jesus what he should do; Mary lets Jesus tell her what she should do.’” (BPS)
- 10:40 “In John 11:1-44, sisters Martha and Mary have a brother named Lazarus and live in the village of Bethany.” (LSB, 1721)
- 10:40a (Greek: *diakonian* — the word from which we derive the word, ‘deacon’) ... **Martha** does her duty. She prepares dinner. She offers hospitality. **Mary**, on the other hand, does none of those things. From Martha's perspective, Mary is neglecting her rightful responsibilities.” (L)

- “Martha's works use some important church words:

diakonia = ‘**tasks**’ (NRSV)

diakoneo = ‘**to do work**’ (NRSV)

While these words have a meaning of ‘waiting on tables’ or ‘serving guests’ -- they also became technical terms for Christian **service** or **ministry**. The words have been transliterated into English as ‘deacon’ and related terms. When can even our ‘religious’ service or ministry become the too anxious busy-work of Martha?” (BPS)

- 10:40b “Martha sees Mary sitting at Jesus' feet, and would like a moment with him too. If Mary would just help, perhaps Martha could find time to talk to him. Furthermore, Mary's presumptuous posture embarrasses Martha and brings shame on their house. Just imagine! A woman! Sitting at Jesus' feet! Like a man!” (L)

Reflection Questions:

- How are you/your faith community distracted from hearing and doing God's word?
- When does our serving/ministry through our faith community become like Martha's busyness? When is the community like Mary? Does your faith community have a rhythm between Martha and Mary, between doing and being with? Explain.
- Pastor Stoffregen asks: “When are our acts of caring proper responses of loving God and neighbors? When are our acts of caring simply busy-work or co-dependency that hinders our relationships with God and neighbors?” Ponder these questions and journal your answers.

Day 4

Luke 10:41-42

⁴¹But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Background:

- 10:41-42 “Though v 38 suggested nothing negative about the nature of Martha's welcome, it is with respect to her hospitality that she is contrasted with Mary. Here and in v 41, she is characterized as one who serves, normally a positive quality in Luke, but whose service is marked by **distractions** and **worry** that conflict with the growth and expression of authentic faith (see 8:14; 12:22, 26). Indeed, Martha's address to Jesus takes an unexpected, perhaps unconscious turn; while she engages in the irony of self-betrayal, her attempt to win Jesus' support in a struggle against her sister ends in self-indictment. The nature of hospitality for which Jesus seeks is realized in attending to one's guest, yet Martha's speech is centered on ‘me’-talk (3 times). Though she refers to Jesus as ‘Lord,’ she is concerned to engage his assistance in her plans, not to learn from him.” (JG, 436-437)
- 10:41-42 “[We] feel put on the defensive by Jesus' words [in these verses]. The story raises questions about the practice of hospitality.

...In this story, Martha welcomed Jesus into her home, and, in the back of believers' minds, through Jesus she welcomed God into her home. But Martha was ‘**distracted by her many tasks.**’ Since they were the tasks of making Jesus feel welcome, we are invited to reexamine the art of hospitality.

What was the point in time when Martha moved from feeling that she was welcoming Jesus to feeling as if her sister was letting her down?...Mary's choice was to focus her energy on ‘listening to the Lord’ ... If 80%, or even 20%, of a church's membership did not allow any task to distract them from listening to the Lord, what might happen to the church!” (SPMcC, 226-7)

- 10:41 “Jesus repeats **Martha's** name as a gentle rebuke. He notes her distraction rather than her hospitality. Certainly he welcomes food, but he welcomes discipleship even more.” (L)
- 10:41 “merimnao = ‘be anxious, be **worried**’ -- this word includes some apprehension about possible dangers or misfortunes. It is the word used repeatedly in Jesus' ‘lilies of the field speech’ (Lu 12:22-31 // Mt 6:25-34) where it is presented in contrast to having faith -- trusting God. In Martha's mind it would be a disaster if everything isn't done just right and on time. Anything less than perfection for her is disastrous and makes her a failure.” (BPS)
- 10:41 “thorubazo = ‘be troubled, distressed, emotionally upset’ -- this is the only occurrence in the NT of this particular word, but related terms refer to a ‘riot’ or ‘(loud) commotion.’ It refers to the commotion (weeping and wailing) and related distress at a death. It refers to the riots the Jews instigated to run Paul out of town. Generally the word group refers to the noise that a crowd makes, either as appreciation: ‘cheers,’ ‘applause;’ or the opposite: ‘groan,’ ‘murmur,’ ‘uproar.’ So the word strongly hints at noise besides just the inner turmoil. Don't we all know people who make sure that everyone else knows about their inner anxieties? Or, as I suggested above, it could refer to all the voices or demands within Martha, pulling her in all sorts of directions [**distracted**].” (BPS)
- 10:41 “Jesus doesn't criticize Martha for her ‘service,’ but for her worries and anxieties about many things -- a life that is being pulled in too many directions. ... When is enough enough?
Perhaps, also, Jesus may be criticizing her for ‘opposing’ [see 10:40] his radical departure from the cultural norm by treating Mary, a female, as a disciple.” (BPS)
- 10:42 “The Greek for ‘**one**’ can be either masculine -- a need for one person (Jesus); or neuter -- a need for one thing -- receiving the Word from Jesus. I checked on Luke's other uses of the word for ‘**need**’ (chreia) and its related verb (chrezo).
A few verses that may relate:
 - ‘Those who are well have no **need** of a physician, but those who are sick.’ (Lu 5:31) -- People without needs don't need Jesus.
 - ‘For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you **need** them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.’ (Lu 12:30-31)
 In contrast to the picture of Mary ‘needing’ to learn at Jesus' feet, every time this word for needs is used in Acts, it seems to refer to physical ‘needs’ (Ac 2:45; 4:35; 6:3; 20:34; 28:10). (BPS)
- 10:42 “(Greek: *agathen merida* — good portion). The **better part** that Mary has chosen is sitting at Jesus' feet and listening — being a disciple. There will be time enough for action. First, the disciple must learn from the master.” (L)
- 10:42 “The import of the Lucan story is that heeding the word of Jesus is the only important thing [**only one thing**]—a lesson harmonious with the earlier answer about the love of God and neighbor as the basic observance necessary for eternal life. It demonstrates that what is required is not complicated.” (REB, 245)
- 10:42 “Some think this passage gives a green light to contemplative spirituality and a red light to a spirituality of action and deeds. But this is impossible to reconcile with Jesus' own life. As we read Luke's Gospel, we find Jesus praying in solitude and then taking the strength he has gained from that encounter with the divine to preach the good news to thousands and heal them of all their infirmities. This passage is about something else...No doubt part of the problem is Martha's attitude...It is not that Martha is a woman without faith...Jesus is not chiding her for cooking or being hospitable or because he knows there is no faith in her heart equal to Mary's. He is pointing out to her that the service she is rendering is coming out of frustration, anxiety, and anger and that it isn't necessary for her to be in such a state. If she is not happy doing the cooking, if she is not finding God there, why not join Mary and talk with him a while? There is a place for physical food, certainly, but it is never more important than taking in spiritual vitality...Jesus is emphasizing...that drawing close to his words and Spirit are

essential. Everything else, no matter how important it is, is secondary. Instead of agreeing to send Mary off to the kitchen, Jesus indicates that her choice to drink in his words is critical and uncensurable. Jesus appears to be offering the same choice to Martha...” (SFB. 1906)

- 10:42 “...consider Jesus' behavior here in light of the mission and purpose of the journey. Jesus announces that the Kingdom of God has come near to you (10:9), and he tells those who would follow him that nothing must distract them from this reality. No time to rest; no time to bury the dead, even a parent; no time to say goodbye to family; no looking back (10:57-62).

Jesus' presence as guest here signals the coming of God's Kingdom, and there is urgency about it. We might consider Martha's concern for hospitality as similar to the 'distractions' Jesus names at the outset of the journey to Jerusalem. Seen within the context of the journey narrative, Jesus actually acknowledges the importance of Martha's service in ordinary circumstances. But in these extraordinary times they are distractions from the coming of God's reign. Mary shows this by choosing '**the better part.**' In the narrative world of Luke, Mary and Martha show that seeking God's Kingdom is the first priority above all else, even the common customs of hospitality.” (Marilyn Salmon, WP)

- 10:42 “[Think about] the presence of Jesus as guest and host. According to Luke's story, Jesus is always a guest, always the recipient of hospitality. Often he does not exhibit good manners. As a dinner guest, he criticizes his host and other guests (5:29ff; 7:36ff; 14:1,7ff). When his host is a Pharisee, we do not notice his criticism, but his criticism of Martha gets our attention, even offends us. The narrative does not distinguish between hosts, though. Whether Jesus is the guest of a Pharisee or Martha, he is both guest and host. Jesus' presence points to the coming of God's realm and the reordering of what is customary and expected. Martha does the right thing and misses the presence of the Jesus and the good news he represents. Mary risks contempt to be fully in the presence of the guest.” (Marilyn Salmon, WP)
- 10:42 “The **one thing** needed is for Martha to receive the gracious presence of Jesus, to listen to his words, to know that she is valued not for what she does or how well she does it, but for who she is as a child of God...

In a culture of hectic schedules and the relentless pursuit of productivity, we are tempted to measure our worth by how busy we are, by how much we accomplish, or by how well we meet the expectations of others.” (Elisabeth Johnson, WP)

- 10:41-42 “Jesus contrasts Martha's distractedness ('**many things**') with Mary's focus ('**one thing**'). The one thing on which Mary is focused is not bread, but the 'word that comes from the mouth of the Lord' (see Deuteronomy 8:3)

The irony, of course, is that Jesus so recently fed five thousand people with only five loaves and two fish (9:12-17). If he could do that, Martha can trust that he has the means to provide for her guests — that they will not go away hungry.” (L)

- 10:41-42 “Martha's **distraction and worry** leave no room for the most important aspect of hospitality -- gracious attention to the guest. In fact, she breaks all the rules of hospitality by trying to embarrass her sister in front of her guest, and by asking her guest to intervene in a family dispute. She even goes so far as to accuse Jesus of not caring about her (**Lord, do you not care...?**).

Martha's **worry and distraction** prevent her from being truly present with Jesus, and cause her to drive a wedge between her sister and herself, and between Jesus and herself. She has missed out on the '**one thing needed**' for true hospitality. There is no greater hospitality than listening to your guest. How much more so when the guest is Jesus!” (Elisabeth Johnson, WP)

Reflection Questions:

- In your own words, how would you talk about/describe the “one thing” Jesus says is needed?
- (BPS) “How can we encourage our faithful church volunteers to stop doing for a while—to sit, listen, learn, and grow in their understanding of the faith and personal discipleship?”

- (BPS) “How do we make our council/[ministry team] meetings something more than simply business meetings? How (or should) we encourage council members to be spiritual leaders of the faith community more than just managers of the resources? Why do such leadership groups let the worries and distractions of many (important?) things keep them from the one thing that is truly important? And yet, there are many business concerns that need attention in our churches. Bills need to be paid. Toilets need to be fixed. Bread and wine need to be bought or prepared. How do we balance these business matters with sitting and listening?”
- (Elisabeth Johnson, WP): “as Jesus says in Luke 12:25, ‘Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?’ We know that worrying does no good, and that much of what we worry about is not so important in the larger scheme of things, and yet we cannot seem to quell our anxious thoughts and frantic activity.” What are some ways we might deal with worry within ourselves? Within our faith family? Journal.

Day 5

Reread the entire Scripture:

- Does anything significant or new stand out for you with this reading?
- After studying and meditating on this Scripture, what do you think God might be saying to you?

Reread the entire Scripture again.

- What prayer rises up in you (what would you like to say to God) after reflecting (listening to what God had to say to you) on this Scripture?

Reflection questions:

- What difference does this story make in your life?
- Where do you see Martha’s serving in yourself? Where do you see Mary’s listening in yourself? How do you balance these two facets in your own life? How are these balanced in the life of your faith community.
- “What would Jesus likely say to you if he dropped in on your home today?” (SB, 163)
- Journal what you think is the purpose of this story and how you think it applies to today’s world?
- What is the invitation in this story for you? How will you answer this invitation? Journal.
- “Our natural inclination is to justify what Jesus does. But perhaps this story intends to disturb us. We might ask what the story accomplishes by portraying Jesus in an unexpected way.” (Marilyn Salmon, WP) How do you answer this question?
- An exercise from *The Spiritual Formation Bible: Growing in Intimacy with God through Scripture*:

“Lord, Don’t You Care?”

Put yourself in Martha’s place. You have worked hard to offer the Lord hospitality, using all the skills you have and providing the sumptuous feast that is fitting for your honored guest. Hot and tired, your face contorts with annoyance when you see Mary just sitting at Jesus’ feet. You ask, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?’

Let Jesus address you lovingly, personally: ‘_____, you are worried and distracted by many things.’ Tell Jesus ‘the many things’ bothering you. Hear Jesus say to you: ‘_____, there is need of only one thing.’ What is the one thing that’s needed now in life? Allow a word or phrase to rise within you. Repeat it slowly, letting that word or phrase carry your concerns, one by one, into the heart of God.” (page 1369)

A quote from Mikael Parsons, *Working Preacher*

“Christ gently reminds Martha (and Luke’s audience), that Mary’s is ‘the better part,’ because actions -- even acts of Christian charity and hospitality -- if they are to be sustained, always follow being; that is, what we do flows naturally from who we are.”

Quote by Marilyn Salmon, WP

“This brief encounter within the gospel narrative purposely disrupts expectations and disturbs our sense of propriety.”

Quote by Elisabeth Johnson, WP

“Both listening and doing, receiving God’s Word and serving others, are vital to the Christian life, just as inhaling and exhaling are to breathing. Yet how often do we forget to breathe in deeply? Trying to serve without being nourished by God’s word is like expecting good fruit to grow from a tree that has been uprooted.

Luke’s story is left suspended. We do not know what happened next -- whether Mary and Martha were reconciled, whether they were all able to enjoy the meal that Martha had prepared, whether Martha was finally able to sit and give her full attention to Jesus.

We do know that Jesus invites all of us who are worried and distracted by many things to sit and rest in his presence, to hear his words of grace and truth, to know that we are loved and valued as children of God, to be renewed in faith and strengthened for service. There is need of only one thing: attention to our guest. As it turns out, our guest is also our host, with abundant gifts to give.”

Three selections from the Commentary by Brian Stoffregen

1) “Culpepper (Luke, *New Interpreter's Bible*) makes these observations:

The story of the good Samaritan then develops the meaning of the command to love one's neighbor, and the story of Mary and Martha highlights the overriding importance of devotion to the Lord's Word as an expression of one's love for God. The story of the good Samaritan features ‘a certain man’ (v. 30), while Martha is introduced as ‘a certain woman’ (v. 38). The good Samaritan exemplifies the disciples' seeing; in a similar way, Mary exemplifies the virtue of hearing (see 10:23-24). Moreover, both the Samaritan and Mary, a woman, represent marginalized persons -- unlikely heroes. As a composite, they are model disciples: ‘those who hear the word of God and do it’ (8:21). [p. 231]”

2) “Green (*The Gospel of Luke*) notes in a footnote (p. 436) that the contrast is not really between Martha's doing or service and Mary's listening, but between ‘hearing the word’ (namely, discipleship) and ‘anxious’ behavior (namely, the antithesis of discipleship).”

3) “From Craddock (Luke, *Interpretation Commentary*):

If we censure Martha too harshly, she may abandon serving altogether, and if we commend Mary too profusely, she may sit there forever. There is a time to go and do; there is a time to listen and reflect. Knowing which and when is a matter of spiritual discernment. If we were to ask Jesus which example applies to us, the Samaritan or Mary, his answer would probably be Yes.

. . . Martha was so anxious about doing that she had trouble hearing the word of God. She is given the example of Mary -- a woman who should have been working in the kitchen just as

hard as Martha -- and Jesus should have known better. Proper rabbis do not let women to sit at their feet and be disciples.

. . . There is a time to 'go and do' and a time to 'sit and listen.' Can we help ... people understand the importance to their faith of coming to church or even committee meetings to 'sit and listen' -- and not to do? Yet, at the same time, to have them take seriously our dismissal of 'Go in peace. Serve the Lord.' Their lives after the 'sitting and listening' of corporate worship means continuing to worship God by lives of active service."

Words from David Lose, *in Dear Working Preacher*

The importance of Biblical stories having value in our lives:

"I want to suggest that one of the great reasons the church is declining during our day is that most of our people have a hard time connecting what we do at church with what we do the rest of the week. Their faith practices on Sunday are nice, perhaps even comfortable, but they don't inform their daily decisions at work, home, or school. In short, they don't find their faith particularly *useful*. And in a 24/7 world of multiple opportunities and obligations, they -- oh, let's face it, *we* -- tend to privilege those things that help us navigate, make sense of, and get more from our lives. We tend to privilege, that is, those things that are -- you guessed it -- useful to us.

. . . And that's what I crave for our people -- the conviction that these stories we read actually have value. Why? Because if the only time we think about biblical stories is on Sunday morning -- in other words, they don't help us lead more fruitful lives the rest of the week -- then sooner or later we're going to wonder why we're spending time with these stories at all. (Which is exactly what a lot of folks, I suspect, have already done.)"

In regards to "hospitality" and "doing":

"In short, Martha is doing exactly what was expected of her -- she is working hard to extend hospitality to her guest.

Why, then, Jesus' seemingly harsh words? Perhaps because Martha has lost something essential in her dutiful labors to be responsible and hospitable: herself. She has forgotten, that is, that ultimately she is valued and loved not because of what she does, but because of who she is. That is not her intent, of course, but amid her concern to care for Jesus she forgot to listen to him, the One who might remind her that she is a beloved child of God.

. . . let's be clear: there is nothing wrong with *doing* -- my goodness, . . . the previous story of the Good Samaritan ended with Jesus telling the lawyer 'go and *do* likewise.' But amid all of our doing we, also, can get distracted, lured into thinking that we ultimately will only find our true value and purpose in and through what we do, rather than in who we are, God's beloved children.

Psalm 15

¹O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?

²Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart;

³who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors;

⁴in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the LORD; who stand by their oath even to their hurt;

⁵who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved.