

Choose the one thing that is needed Luke 10:38-42

³⁸ As they went on their way, Jesus came into a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who was sitting at the Lord's feet and was listening to his word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with all her serving. She came over and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me." ⁴¹ The Lord answered and told her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but one thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part, which will not be taken away from her."

How wonderful it is for a child of God living today. If we were living in Old Testament times, we wouldn't have all the freedoms we enjoy as God's people. God had Moses lead his people out of Egypt. But it didn't take long to find out what kind of people they were. They turned out to be spiritual babies that God had to lead by the hand. He had to tell them exactly how he wanted them to live and the precise steps they were to take in order to worship him. About the only choice he left with was described by Joshua: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

Now that Christ has come and has canceled the written code with its regulations by nailing it to the cross (Colossians 2:14), the Lord allows us many choices. God chose to have his Old Testament people worship him on Saturday. Now God leaves it up to us when we worship, be it Thursday or Sunday or any day we choose. In Old Testament times only descendants of Aaron could serve as priests. But now we're all part of the priesthood of believers. And public ministers of the gospel come from parsonages and teacherages, from the homes of mechanics, machinists, factory workers or even from the farm. Here at St. Michael's you have many choices to serve your Lord. You can serve in worship, by playing an instrument, singing in the choir, changing flowers on the altar and setting up for communion, or by ushering to make sure everything is done decently and in order. You can choose to serve meals in the basement to a grieving family or to celebrate a high point in the church year. But there is only one choice that can be the best choice that a child of God can make. The best choice is shown us by the Gospel writer Luke. As we sit at Jesus feet today and listen to what he told his good friend Martha, may the Holy Spirit lead us to always choose the one thing we need most.

Luke describes an incident in which Jesus and his disciples came to the home of a woman named Martha. She had a sister named Mary. And from John's Gospel we know they had a brother named Lazarus. Jesus would later miraculously raise Lazarus from the dead. Martha welcomed Jesus and his disciples to her home. Luke tells us that Martha kept herself busy while Jesus was there. She was probably preparing a special meal for her Lord and his disciples. While Martha was getting everything ready. Sister Mary was doing nothing except sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to what he had to say. What a wonderful opportunity! Your

Lord comes into your home to speak to you. Mary wasn't going to let anything get in the way of this golden opportunity. So Mary sits down right by Jesus and listens to his every word.

Unfortunately, Martha didn't choose to do the same. Luke tells us, *"Martha was distracted with all her serving. She came over and said, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me.'"* I think we can sympathize with Martha, can't we? The original wording of the text indicates that all the preparations that needed to be made were just dragging Martha around. Her stress level had reached an all-time high by all the work she was doing and that needed to be done. And to make matters worse, her sister wasn't helping at all. Poor Martha. Unfortunately, she could have made a better choice. By choosing to serve Jesus in this way, she was missing out on the one thing she needed most.

Can serving our Lord be a bad choice? This summer many people offered their services to help make our VBS day a success. Any given week in this congregation there are a number of individuals serving their Lord in many ways. All of God's people serve well at work, at home, at play, wherever they are. And our Lord loves them for it. That's why he had Paul tell the Corinthian Christians, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 11:31). In the verses just before our text, Luke records Jesus telling the story of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan was a good neighbor to a man who was severely injured by robbers. He served the man's medical needs and took care of him. How can such service be wrong?

Serving is wrong when a person does it to earn God's favor. God forbid that you or I ever get the idea that we must earn God's love by helping with VBS or by serving on this board or that. All the money I put into the offering plate isn't going to bring me closer to my Lord. Putting in a full week of work might bring me peace with my company, but it will never bring me peace with God. You can serve your whole life through and still never earn God's favor.

There is only one reason why God can possibly love sinful creatures like you and me. It's because of the One who entered our world not to be served, but to serve and give his life as our ransom for sin. God looks favorably on us because his Son took away our sin and paid dearly for them all when he died on a cross. God can only be pleased with us because he has wrapped us up in his Son's holiness in the waters of baptism. He now declares us righteous in his sight through the merits of Christ Jesus. We never serve our Lord to earn his favor. We serve our Lord because Christ has earned us God's favor. He did this with his holy life, with his innocent death, and with his glorious return to life on Easter.

I don't think we can say that Martha was serving our Lord in order to win his favor. At the death of her brother Lazarus she gave this beautiful confession of faith in Jesus: *"I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world"* (John 11:26). Martha loved her Lord for coming to rescue her from sin. She wanted to show her love to her Savior. That's why she kept busy preparing a meal fit for the King of all kings. Martha didn't make a bad choice. She just didn't make the best choice. And her sister Mary did. Mary chose the one thing she needed most.

Luke tells us Mary *“was sitting at the Lord’s feet and was listening to his word.”* For Mary, her choice was an easy one. It wasn’t that she was too lazy to work her tail off the way sister Martha did. But when her Lord and Savior entered her home, she saw an opportunity she simply could not pass up. There was nothing better than listening to her Lord speak. Every word he spoke came dripping with life-saving power. Sure there was plenty to do around the house. But Mary chose the one thing she needed most. She needed to listen to her Lord.

Jesus knew that Mary had made the best choice. And he wanted Martha to do the same. *“Martha, Martha,” he tells her, “you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part, which will not be taken away from her.”* Jesus wasn’t too concerned about what they were having for dinner. He wasn’t going to walk out on them if the food got cold or if Martha didn’t have his favorite vegetable. Jesus was concerned about one thing in that home. It was sharing his saving message with everyone there. His disciples were there to listen. That’s why they dedicated their life to follow him wherever he went. Mary was there to listen too. That’s why she put everything aside to focus in on her Savior’s every word. Martha needed to listen too. But sadly she was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. Martha didn’t make the best choice. She didn’t choose the one thing she needed most. But sister Mary did. Mary chose to listen to her Lord. And Jesus promised it *“will not be taken from her.”*

What a great choice Mary made! Imagine yourself being in Martha’s home, joining Mary and the other disciples listening to Jesus speak. You do have that opportunity here. Our Lord speaks to us plainly on the pages of Holy Scripture. Like Mary we can sit at Jesus’ feet and listen. Which choice will we make? Mary’s or Martha’s? When I read this portion of Scripture I usually think about Thanksgiving when I was growing up. Mom was up early, even before Dad got up for milking. It was a special day and a busy day. Family was coming over. So our rooms needed to be picked up and beds made. The house needed to be spotless. Maybe it’s the same way at your house. As special as each Thanksgiving was, one thing was missing. We never spent Thanksgiving in the Lord’s house. It could be that they never had the service at the time we went to church. And there were extra things to be done besides our normal chores. Of course, we’ve remedied Thanksgiving’s business by having Thanksgiving worship the night before here at St. Michael’s. When it comes down to it, all the preparations, must be set aside to sit and listen to our Lord speak. That doesn’t just apply to Thanksgiving. Every day we need to cut into our busy schedules and listen to our Lord speak. Faith doesn’t come from serving. It comes from hearing the message. We sheep follow the Good Shepherd by listening to his voice. We do this gladly because he gives us eternal life. Each time we listen to his Word, we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and make our faith stronger.

There’s nothing wrong with serving your Lord. For all that your Lord has done for you, how can you not serve him? But don’t let your service get in the way of what you need most. You and I know what is the better choice. Like Mary we’ll put everything aside and listen to your Lord. When you do that, you make the right choice for what you need the most. And like Mary, it will not be taken away from you either.