

## Discovering The One Thing

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Based on Luke 10:38-42

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One Sunday a child came home from visiting a new church. His parents are curious about how things went in Sunday School and so they ask him some questions.

“What was your teacher’s name?”

“I don’t know,” the child responds. “I don’t remember her name.”

“Well, do you remember anything about her?”

“I think she is Jesus’ grandmother.”

Taken aback, the parents ask, “Why would you think that?”

“Well,” the young boy said, “all she did was hold up a picture of Jesus and brag about him the whole time!”

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In the gospel today we encounter two sisters, Mary and Martha. To help us get into the story, allow me to retell the story with a modern twist:

Mary and Martha had just finished lunch. They were both ready for their afternoon nap. That’s when the knock came at the door. Martha went to see who it was.

When she opened the door, she couldn’t believe her eyes. There was Jesus, along with his 12 disciples. Mary and Martha were just thrilled to see Jesus. After all, they were good friends. But very quickly panic set in. Martha could have just kicked herself for talking herself into waiting until tomorrow to clean the house.

After inviting the group in, Martha begins to scurry around trying to tidy things up. Anything that resembles clutter is tossed into a closet or under a bed. Mary then informs Martha that Jesus and his disciples hadn’t eaten lunch yet. They were hungry. Martha – the first century Martha Stewart – takes a deep breath knowing that she would have to get creative to feed thirteen people with what she has in the pantry.

The fact that Jesus was sitting in her living room, she wanted everything to be perfect. So she rinses off the fine china and polishes the silver. Martha very quickly

becomes overwhelmed: the table needs to be set, the food needs to be made, the flowers need arranging.

Martha gets so wrapped up in all the preparations that she doesn't make time to visit with Jesus. Mary, on the other hand, is sitting in the living room with Jesus savoring his every word.

Martha becomes so overwhelmed that she bursts out of the kitchen in search of Mary. When she sees Mary just sitting there, Martha unfortunately blurts out what's on her mind: "You know, Jesus, perhaps you ought to remind Mary that food doesn't just cook itself!"

Martha is expecting Jesus to scold Mary for just sitting there making Martha do all the work. But instead, in a very loving way, Jesus informs Martha that Mary has made the better choice. Mary has discovered that one thing in life is more important than any other. When all is said and done, there is only one thing that we truly need. One thing only will truly satisfy. That one thing is Jesus.

In her book, "If Life Is A Bowl Of Cherries, What Am I Doing Here In The Pits" Erma Bombeck tells of two moments in her husband's life. She writes, "When the children were growing up my husband would look at the back yard where the children played, survey the bare patches where the lawn *used* to be, and silently wonder, 'Will the grass ever grow back?'"

Then when the children were grown and gone, my husband would look out over the immaculate green lawn and wonder, 'Will the children ever come back?'"

Some things in life that seem all so important aren't all that important. It's the very issue that Martha and Mary are wrestling with in the gospel. Whereas Martha is frantically trying to be the perfect host, Mary realizes that Jesus is the true Host, and so she chooses to simply sit with him and be blessed by his presence.

Now, I don't want us to draw the wrong conclusion. Jesus does not say that Martha's hospitality is unimportant or trivial. Jesus does not reject her gifts. After all, in the ancient world – much like today – it was a disgrace not to offer refreshments to your guests. And let's face it: the church wouldn't function without the Martha types. They are the ones that make things happen.

Jesus simply tells Martha that she is distracted. In the Greek language, "distracted" literally means, "to be drawn away." Jesus tells Martha that in her franticness, she is being drawn away from discovering the one thing that is truly important. Jesus – God's very own Son – is sitting in Martha and Mary's living room, and Martha does not seize the opportunity to just be in his presence. She is too preoccupied with all of the details.

Martha forgot an important spiritual truth: without first being nourished by the Word of God, we will soon become worried and distracted by many things. The concerns of our life and the needs of this world will quickly overwhelm if we do not first discover the Good News: that God is already at work in our lives to sustain and heal and bless.

During the Reformation, Martin Luther taught, “We do not become Christians by anything we do, but only by listening to the Word of God.” In the gospel today, Jesus reminds Martha that the Word of God is the only thing that she really needs to focus upon – it’s the only thing that will offer her true peace amidst all of the franticness of life.

Just as Mary did, we all need to discover that there is only one thing that we truly need. And that one thing is Jesus.

All too often, we spend our time on trivial things, on those things that ultimately don’t have any lasting value. Here I am, Jesus says, knocking on your door, wanting to spend some quality time with you. But you seem so preoccupied with other things. Why don’t you just come sit for awhile and allow me to nourish you with the Word of God – the Bread of Life. Then you will never hunger again... except for more of my life-giving Word.

What is it in your life that draws you away from Jesus? What it is that distracts you from truly discovering that Jesus is the only thing you really need in life?

Pastors have very busy schedules. It’s always funny to talk about “office hours” because in reality we are on-call 24-7, available any time of day to shepherd the flock. With such long hours, I have to remind myself often that in order to faithfully serve you I have to set aside time to just be with Jesus. I can’t fill you up if my well runs dry.

We all need to take time to recharge our spiritual batteries. Our sinful nature makes us worried and distracted people. We fill our days with things that do not nourish us, that leave us hungry, unsatisfied. Service without worship will eventually burn us out. Sitting at the feet of Jesus – in whatever form that takes in your life – is a must if you want to have peace in life and energy to serve the Lord.

One of my favorite things about the winter season is I get to wear my London Fog overcoat. I love that coat. There are lots of big buttons that run down the front. Sometimes when I’m in a hurry and just start buttoning the coat from any button hole, the bottom hem of the coat ends up uneven – cockeyed. When I don’t get the first button in the right hole, all the rest of them end up out of line.

That’s the same truth that Jesus is teaching us in the gospel today. If we don’t put Jesus first in our lives, then everything else will end up out of whack. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and God will give

you everything you need.” Until we discover that ultimately Jesus is the only thing we need in life, then our lives will continue to be like Martha’s – distracted, worried, overwhelmed, frustrated.

As you go about your life this week, be mindful of how much time you spend with Jesus and how much time you are busy “in the kitchen,” so to speak. How much time are you spending on trivial matters (that at the time seem so important) and how much time are you giving to those things which have eternal significance?

The Prayer Adventure we are using this summer – of committing 30 minutes to God every day – is a wonderful tool we can use to keep our hearts focused on that which is truly important. It’s never too late to start, or to restart if our time with Jesus has fallen by the wayside. God’s Word puts things into perspective. It helps us focus our lives on those things that bring happiness, peace, and salvation. Sitting at the feet of Jesus grants us wisdom to know the difference between trivial things and those things of eternal importance.

Is Jesus that one thing in life that we just can’t do without? That’s the way God intended us to live our lives – centered on Jesus and the words of Holy Scripture. As we gather each week in this place, we sit and listen to Jesus through Scripture, sermon, songs, and prayers. We gather around the feet of Jesus at this Table and are nourished by his body and blood. We quickly realize that this time we spend with Jesus blesses us. It changes us. We leave this place renewed – hopeful of a better tomorrow, ready to deal with whatever we must, knowing that Jesus is with us.

Whatever life brings, we should find ourselves sitting at the feet of Jesus. For it’s there (and only there) that we will be blessed with whatever we need to faithfully carry on.

Let it be so in your life and in mine. Amen.