

Sermon for July 24, 2016 – Pentecost 10*

Luke 10:38-42 (NIV84)

Theme: Just stop, sit, and listen to Jesus!

1. Leave your worries behind.
2. Listen attentively to His Word.
3. Apply His peace to your life.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

What is the most important activity for a Christian to be involved in? Is it visiting the sick and shut-in? Is it maintaining this building? How about performing acts of charity and service to our community? What about serving the Church with whatever spiritual gift God has given you?

Now, don't get me wrong: all these things are incredibly important. However, they are of no spiritual benefit, in and of themselves, unless they are combined with the one, essential activity God wants all Christians to be occupied with. And what is that activity? It's listening to Jesus by meditating on his Word. Let us consider this truth, under the theme: **Just stop, sit, and listen to Jesus!** 1) *Leave your worries behind.* 2) *Listen attentively to His Word.* 3) *Apply His peace to your life.*

Part One: Leave your worries behind.

Our sermon text begins: *As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.*

Jesus' friends - Mary and Martha - had great faith in Him, which exhibited itself in different ways. Martha, for instance, was concerned for Jesus' wellbeing. She understood the rigors of his ministry and wanted to make his stay with them as comfortable as possible. Everything she did, she did out of love for her LORD – trusting that he was *the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.*ⁱ

Mary, however, exhibited her faith in a different way. She too believed that Jesus was the Christ; but, whereas Martha considered this fact to be the reason she ought to make serving him her top priority, Mary viewed this fact as the reason she ought to make listening to him her top

priority. She understood that his whole purpose in coming to this earth was to “*preach the good news of the kingdom of God*”.ⁱⁱ And so, while Martha labored for her LORD, Mary listened to him instead.

We read: *Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.*

I can empathize with Martha. There was so much she wanted to do for Jesus – and entertaining a guest in that culture was not as easy as it is today. Water needed to be gathered from a well, animals needed to be freshly slaughtered for their meat, bread was made from scratch, vegetables needed to be cleaned and cooked . . . There was a lot to do. Martha must have wondered “Doesn’t my sister care about Jesus? He’s our guest. This is his time to rest. We need to get busy serving him and not bother him with questions.”

I can imagine Martha gave Mary subtle hints that she should help; but Mary - being absorbed in Jesus’ teaching – probably didn’t catch them. With all that needed to be done, Martha had enough! Thinking that Jesus would understand, *she came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

The LORD certainly cared for Martha. He saw all that she was trying to do for Him, and loved her. But there was one big problem: all her service was keeping her from doing the one thing He really wanted her to do: to stop, sit and listen to him. Jesus didn’t come to Martha’s house to cause her trouble. He came to bring her peace. And so, in a gentle way, he bids Martha to become like Mary: to leave behind all her troubles and worries in order to listen to Him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is so easy for us to be like Martha. Having experienced the Gospel, we truly love our LORD and look for ways to serve him. Now, it certainly isn’t wrong to serve Jesus. He appreciates the fact that our hearts are willing to do so. However, Jesus becomes greatly concerned when our service takes priority over simply listening to His Word. Why’s that? Because if we choose serving him over listening to him, our faith becomes “me” focused - all about us, our love and what we can do for God. When this happens we marginalize Christ’s awesome work for us on the cross without even realizing it. We start to become like Pharisees – thinking we can earn God’s favor through our actions. We worry that it’s up to us to build God’s church by keeping ourselves busy with all sorts of efforts and programs – proving our love and dedication to God. Whenever our service to God supplants simply listening to His Word, all sorts of worries, concerns and distractions fill our minds – drawing us away from the one thing needful.

But here’s the thing: Jesus’ never asked us to worry about all the ways we should serve him. What he has asked of us instead is to stop, sit and listen to him. He wants us to leave all our cares and worries behind. He wants us to focus our attention on his Word, which records all the wonderful things he has done for us.

Part Two: Listen attentively to His Word.

Oh, how wonderful an example Mary is for us. She didn't just use Jesus, as her sister implied, to get out of her work. The whole reason she stopped what she was doing is because she recognized him as her Savior. She knew that listening to him was the greatest service she could render him.

And so this simple woman sat at Jesus' feet – taking on the very position Jewish students took when being taught by their Rabbis. She absorbed herself in Jesus' teaching – making every effort to listen and learn. She didn't let all the hustle and bustle of what was going on around her deter her from listening– even if she could sense her sister's annoyance.

And why did Mary listen to Jesus so intently? Because she believed Jesus was the Son of God. His Words were important. And what did he tell her? What he told everyone: the good news about the Kingdom of God. He explained to her how he would suffer and die for the sins of the world, and be raised on the third day so that, whoever repents and believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. Jesus' taught Mary the same thing he teaches us every Sunday: He taught Mary about God's love for us in Christ.

And, even though the concepts Jesus taught were difficult for any human to understand, Mary listened intently – asking Jesus to help her believe. And Jesus did help her – giving her such insight into his work that it, at one point, surpassed the disciples. Listening to Jesus gave Mary joy. It brought her peace – assuring her of the love God has for her in Christ. He would not allow anyone or anything separate her from that love.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: what are some of the excuses you offer for not coming to Bible class or reading your Bible at home? Do you find yourself thinking: “All my responsibilities are preventing me from having private devotions. I'm just too busy.” Or how about this one: “I'm just a simple person. The Bible is far too complex for me to understand?” If these are your excuses, think about how Mary, who lived in a culture where everything had to be done by hand, made time to listen to Jesus. Consider that this simple woman, who had far less education we have, prayerfully made every effort to listen and learn. And because she did this, God blessed her with such insight that, when the time for Jesus' death came near, she was the only person who anointed Jesus with perfume – understanding that he was going to die for the sins of the world.ⁱⁱⁱ

All these blessings came to Mary because she made listening to Jesus her top priority: understanding that his Word is the one thing needful. Do you understand this? Oh, may the Lord forgive us for all the excuses we make for not taking time to listen to his Word! He wants to strengthen our faith and set our hearts at peace through his Gospel. Understand this and make every effort to spend some time with Jesus everyday by meditating on his Word. Maybe you can set your alarm a little earlier in the morning and, before you grab your cell phone, take your Bible into another room. Keep the TV and radio off. Pray: “Speak Lord, your servant is listening,” and open the Bible to look for Jesus. He is on every page of Scripture – ready to teach you and apply his peace to your life.

Part Three: Apply His peace to your life.

Listening to Jesus' has an incredible impact on our lives. We have already observed how it gave Mary peace and insight, and it does the same for us as well.

I don't need to tell you that our world is a scary place. There is so much tragedy going on around us - so much that doesn't make sense. What should our response be?

Stop, sit and listen to Jesus. Meditate on his Word, and you will receive the insight you need. The LORD will lead you to see how everything going on in the world today is happening exactly how he said it would. More importantly, Jesus will direct you to his promised salvation that you might have hope.

And, as the LORD applies that hope to our lives, we will become like Mary – growing in faith and love toward the LORD. Our service will start to take on new meaning because it will no longer be done out of guilt. No, our service to the LORD has its source in the Gospel of God's love for us in Christ. That Gospel invigorates us by promising that there is nothing we need to do to save ourselves. Jesus has done it all. Through faith, we belong to him. Heaven is our certain home.

This truth makes us look at the world differently. It gives us patience. It gives us peace. It directs our lives as we use the spiritual gifts God has given us in service of his Gospel. As I mentioned before: serving the LORD is important, but it should never surpass listening to Jesus. Listening to him is the one thing needful, from which our acts of charity and love should always flow.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: what is the most essential action you can do as a Christian? It's listening to Jesus with a singleness of heart. Understand how much God wants to converse with you through his Word, and the rich blessings he offers through it. Leave your worries behind. Listen attentively to his Word. Apply his peace to your life. Then you will experience the same joy Mary had with Jesus – a joy that can only be brought about through faith in the Gospel of God's love for us in Christ. Amen.

ⁱ John 11:27 NIV84

ⁱⁱ Luke 4:43 NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. John 12:7