

Luke 10:38-42

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Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things,⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

"Come Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blest." You all know those words; obviously that's the common table prayer among North American Lutherans. You know those words so well, I bet you could rattle them off without even thinking about them. And that's the problem, isn't it? We probably do regularly rattle off those words without thinking about them at all, and we pass it off as a prayer. But if you stop to actually think about those words, it's very strange what we are saying. *"Come Lord Jesus, be our guest..."* Jesus, come into our house, and be a guest at our table for this meal. *"And let these gifts to us be blest."* In other words: Jesus, our guest, we want *you* to bless *us* with the food we're about to eat. That's backwards, isn't it?

It is opposite the way we traditionally treat dinner guests. If you invite people over to your house for dinner, you are the one doing the cooking and cleaning and serving, and they come and relax as the guests of honor. It doesn't go the other way. You don't invite someone over and then expect them to serve you. But that is the way our relationship with God works. After all, Jesus says, ***"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*** (Matthew 20:28) We see then that the really important thing is for God to serve us. And so we pray, *"Come Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blest."* Lord, please come into our house and serve us.

We see both sides of this idea in our text this morning. Jesus was the guest in the house of some friends. One of the sisters was overly focused on serving Jesus, and the other was focused on Jesus serving her. We could take away the lesson, "Don't be a Martha, be a Mary," but then we'd really be missing the point of this text. The point isn't Martha or Mary or what they did, the focus is what Jesus does. He's the one whose service is most important. And so, the theme we'll be considering today is:

"Come Lord Jesus, Be Our Guest"

- I. He's the Guest who came not to *be* served
- II. He's the Guest who came to serve

Martha catches a bad rap because of this event. Most likely, if you're ever thinking about Martha, you're probably thinking about the time when she was so busy serving, she had to be reprimanded by her Savior. But really, if we were in her shoes, would we have done any differently? She and her sister Mary knew who Jesus was. They knew that He was ***"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*** (John 1:29) They had likely been on hand for many of His miracles and had seen Him do things that only God Himself could do. Now they had invited Him over for dinner, and Martha was going to do everything in her limited power to make sure it was a meal fit for God Himself. We would do the very same thing.

This wasn't the first time that God had been a dinner guest with ordinary people. Of course, we know of many times when Jesus went to such and such a person's house and reclined with them for a meal. But I'm thinking of a time thousands of years before this when God sat down to eat with a couple of believers. Of course, I'm referring to our Old Testament reading from Genesis 18, when the LORD visited Abraham and Sarah. This was not the first time that Abraham had encountered Jehovah God, and he

must have realized that this was God Himself, because he told Sarah to get **“three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.”** (Genesis 18:6) And this was an extravagant amount. Much like Martha, Abraham was going to make sure that God was well served. You see, one seah of flour is approximately 7 ½ quarts worth of flour; so when he says, “get three seahs of flour,” if this was in American terms, his instructions would be, “Grab six 5-pound bags of flour and using 90 cups of flour, make three cakes for these men.” This was an extravagant meal, much more than three people could eat. But Abraham knew he was serving the Lord. And God did not stop him! He did not say, “No, don’t serve me, I came to talk about some important things with you.” God sits down and allows Abraham and Sarah to serve Him.

It wasn’t wrong for them to serve God, just like it wasn’t wrong for Martha to serve God. But there was a sin involved in both accounts. In the Genesis account, the Lord then announced to Abraham that he and his wife would give birth to a son Isaac, and at that, **“Sarah laughed.”** (Genesis 18:12) She was old, and she thought, “This is impossible.” She became distracted by the things she could see and lost sight of who God was and what God could do. It was really the same case with Martha. She became distracted by her service to Jesus, and she lost sight of who Jesus was and the important work that He was there doing. It was a good thing for her to serve the Lord, but where she went wrong was that she was distracted by her own service. And as Jesus said, **“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things.”**

Jesus could wake each one of us up with a, **“Martha, Martha.”** Because we very often get distracted by the things that *we* are doing. And yes, it can be things that aren’t all that important that distract us from God’s Word. It can be work, it can be vacation, it can be football, it can be finances. There are all manner of distractions that take our focus off of the Word of God, in fact I’m sure there are a number of distractions that have started to take our attention off of God’s Word even in the course of this sermon so far. But Jesus says there is one thing necessary, and it’s not those areas that we spend most of our time on. But those are the obvious distractions, really. Those are the things we already know.

I want to tell you about something else that can distract us away from God’s Word; something that is good, but that we can turn sinful very easily. And that’s our service towards God. This happens when we make what we do for God to be more important and more valuable than what God does for us. And I’m going to give you a few examples, but first I need to clarify something. I am not accusing anyone of doing these things. But they are sinful mindsets that we need to be aware of and be on guard against, *because* they can easily become our mindsets.

For instance: sometimes you might not be able to get to church on a Sunday morning, and it’s not all that uncommon for someone who misses church to mail an offering or to double up their offering the following Sunday. And that’s good, and I thank the Lord that He moves peoples’ hearts in such a way. But the danger lies in our sinful minds, which can take even those good things and warp them, so that maybe we could start to consider our offerings as letting us off the hook for missing church. Maybe we feel guilty over missing, and so we try to salve that guilt with money. That does happen among sincere Christians. Or another way this can happen would be with a person who has not taken out time to hear God’s Word for a while, but always makes sure to pray to the Lord. And while it’s obviously good to pray, if we allow that to take the place of reading Scripture, then we’ve warped it into something that’s not so good. We talk to God, but we never stop to listen to God! Then we’ve taken something that we are doing and elevated it above what God does. Or personally speaking: as a pastor I spend a great deal of time writing sermons and devotions, leading personal devotions and Bible classes. And that’s good obviously. But what often happens to me, and I know happens to many other pastors as well, is that

you spend a lot of time in the Word of God, and during most of it you're looking for nuggets for your writing. Looking for applications for other people. Hearing really interesting ways to look at a text and you want to share it. But it can be extremely easy to think exclusively about how you're going to share the text, and never stop to really allow the Lord to share it with you, the pastor. Then it's just another example of me being very worried about my serving, but paying very little attention to the meal the Lord wants to serve me.

It is true what the Prophet Isaiah confesses, ***"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."*** (Isaiah 64:6) Even our service to God, which is good, we can turn into evil when we use it as an excuse to ignore God's service to us. That's what Jesus was pointing out to Martha that day. ***"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."*** There's nothing wrong with serving the Lord, in fact, that's very good and important. But it is far better and much more necessary that God serves us with the Words of Christ.

That's the one thing that Jesus was speaking about—the one thing necessary that would not be taken from Mary—His saving Word. And I've often thought about how amazing this opportunity for Mary was. Here was Jesus, the Word made flesh, sharing with her His Word. This was God speaking eye to eye with a woman and sharing the wisdom of God. To sit at the feet of the Savior and be His lone audience, it's amazing to even consider. And we don't know what Jesus was teaching her, but I imagine it had a lot to do with His plan of salvation for her.

I think it's very telling that some time later—when Jesus would sit down for a meal with his disciples just six days before His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion—this same Mary that now sat at His feet and was served by Jesus, would at that next meal be the one doing the serving (cf. Matthew 26:6-13 & John 12:1-8). At that meal, she would sit at His feet again and anoint His feet with oil and dry them with her hair. Judas Iscariot, with his ulterior motives, would say, ***"Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"*** And Jesus replied, ***"In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial."*** (Matthew 26:12) At a time when there still general confusion among the twelve disciples over what was about to happen, Mary sat there quietly, knowing exactly what her Savior was about to go through for her. It wasn't her intuition that taught her that Jesus was about to die for sins; it was Jesus that taught her with His own Words.

And consider Martha as well. We're not told what happened next, but after she was rebuked by Jesus, I imagine that Martha sat down to listen to Jesus as well. She too would later confess her faith in Christ in a very remarkable way. That was after the death of their brother, Lazarus. On that occasion, Jesus arrived in town to meet Mary and Martha four days after Lazarus had already died and been buried. That account is in the book of John, where we can read, ***"When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.'*** ***Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'*** ***Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'*** ***Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?'*** ***She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is come into the world.'"*** (John 11:20-27) This was a truth that could be revealed to her only because God had served her with His Word.

That's what we need to focus on today. Yes, Mary and Martha play important roles in our sermon text, but it's Jesus who plays the most important role. He served them with the only thing that could bring them peace. That's what both of those sisters needed—Martha, worked up and anxious and fretting over this and that; Mary sitting at Jesus' feet understanding that her greatest need was God's forgiveness—and Jesus provided that peace. It was the best thing that was served up that day—peace which had been created in heaven. The assurance that God would remember their sins no more.

And that's the same meal He serves you with today. When we get worked up over whatever is going on in our lives, when our anxiety is worked into a blinding frenzy, we might sometimes feel like Martha did and want to shout, **"Lord, do you not care?"** But in serving us, He assures us that He does care. We see that throughout His Holy Word. Oh yes, He cared very much for you, and He showed that throughout His life as He faced every same temptation and distraction that you face, but He kept His eyes focused squarely on His ultimate goal—you and your soul's salvation. Yes, He cared very much about you, and He showed it when He, the Son of God, was led like a lamb to be slaughtered, but He opened not His mouth. (cf. Isaiah 53:7) He would not let fear or pride take Him away from His mission of dying for you.

The result of His service—God-given peace. Today, you can rest your weary souls on this promise from the Psalms, **"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."** (Psalm 103:12) Or this promise from the prophet Micah: **"He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."** (Micah 7:19)

You might have a lot of problems in your life, but none of them can have the lasting affect that your sin has. It's only your sin which can tear you away from the joys of heaven and deliver you to hell in chains. But that's one problem that's already been solved for you. That's what Jesus' service was all about, delivering full and free forgiveness to you. And now, you need to stop to consider: with that problem already behind you, all your other problems sort of seem to lose their bite, don't they? What can really cause us trouble and anxiety anymore, when our Lord Jesus has promised us a place in heaven? I'm sure you could still find something to worry or fret over, but what's the point? Paul reminds us, God **"has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"** (Hebrews 13:5-6) All of those other worries in your life, God tells you they can't do anything to *really* harm you. And besides, He can take care of those things too. As Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, **"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"** (Romans 8:32)

Talk about great service! Not what we do for God, but what He's done for us. And I love the comfort found in the last line of our text. What He says is true for Mary, but it's also true for you. **"Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."** You can lose your money. You can lose your house, your car, your family, your friends. You can lose your health, your mobility. You could lose your freedom! But God's Word is a treasure which cannot be taken away. His promises to you in that Word, they can't be taken away either. The promise of forgiveness and eternal life—yours forever.

With this great service from God, how can we do anything other than serve God in return? Just as Mary would later serve Jesus by anointing His feet, how could we avoid doing the same for the One who's done everything for us? We can pray, **"Come Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blest."** Lord, come serve us, because that's what is truly most important and necessary. But since we have some time, we'd really like to serve You as well. Afterall, it's not like we have much else to worry about anymore. And so, we can pray, **"Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever."** Amen.