

## **Sermon: Our lesson from Martha**

“Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things.”

Given everything that is happening in the world around us, our nation, and not to mention whatever is going on in our personal lives, those words from Jesus in today’s gospel just might be the gospel understatement of the year.

Many things have left Martha feeling troubled, anxious, and disturbed. She’s being pulled in different directions. Her life is in pieces, divided into parts. It’s as if there are a thousand different things in her heart and on her mind and she’s not able give time, energy, and attention to the “one thing” needed. Maybe she doesn’t even know what that “one thing” is.

I know that over the years, I have struggled with this gospel story, and often wondered what the day would have been like if both Martha and Mary had sat at the feet of Jesus. Who would have prepared the meal for and offered a drink to Jesus then?

I wonder how many of us here today feel like Martha, “worried and upset about many things.” I do and I wouldn’t be surprised if many of you do too.

Chances are most of us are living a Martha kind of life. It’s often what happens when we feel overwhelmed, and the plumb line of our life is swinging wildly.

What are the many things about which you are worried and distracted today? What is dividing your life into parts and pulling you in different

directions? And what are those things doing to you and your relationships?

A few weeks ago, I was talking with a friend, and they commented that every driver these days seem to be distracted.

It was one of those simple yet profound statements that has stuck with me. It's not only about driving cars, but also a metaphor for how most of us are living. We're driving through life with distractions. It's not just dangerous, it's exhausting.

Martha is a distracted driver, and that's not a criticism of her. I know that she truly believed she was doing what she thought she was supposed to be doing.

When Jesus says to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset by many things," I don't think he's making an accusation, he's making an observation of what he is witnessing. He's making a diagnosis not a judgment.

And when he says, "Mary has chosen the better part" I don't think he is opposing Mary, who sits at his feet and listens, to Martha, who is busy with many tasks. I don't think he is saying that Mary is right, and Martha is wrong, or that it's better to sit at his feet and listen than it is to prepare the house and table to welcome a guest.

Look at the life of Jesus. He lives on a Mary-Martha spectrum, as do we all. Sometimes Jesus went off by himself to be alone, silent, and still; to sit, pray, and listen; to be present to his Father.

Other times Jesus was active, on the move, amid people, busy teaching, healing, feeding the 5000. One is not better or more important than the other. We need both in our lives.

Jesus isn't making a value judgment on the things that are distracting Martha. He's recognizing what those distractions are doing to her. Think about distraction as dis-traction, the loss of traction. When we're distracted by many things, we lose traction, and our wheels are spinning. We're not getting anywhere.

In what ways have you lost traction in your life today? And how will you get it back? Being more focused, paying better attention, rearranging our schedule, cutting down the to do list, getting some help, self-medicating, avoiding, or complaining are our usual remedies. And so, it is for Martha.

Martha thinks if Mary would just help, get up and do some work, everything would be better. She sees her distractions as her circumstances. We often do too. But Jesus doesn't address the circumstances, he addresses Martha. The distractions are not about what is happening around her but about what is happening within her. Her many tasks have divided her into many parts. How many of you out there can relate to this scenario? I know I can sometimes.

What if the opposite of and antidote to distraction isn't focus, working harder, or paying more attention but traction? Traction is what lets us move forward and get somewhere. Maybe that's what Jesus is talking about when he says, "There is need of only one thing," Maybe he's talking about traction. And what if we gain traction when we choose "the better part?"

Choosing “the better part” doesn’t mean the other parts are wrong. It simply means that at this time, in this place, and under these circumstances there is a better part to be chosen. What if Martha could have chosen hospitality with the same wholeheartedness with which Mary chose sitting and listening? That just might have been the “one thing” for her, “the better part.”

We don’t all have to choose the same “one thing.” What if there is a “better part” for you and a “better part” for me just like there is for Mary and Martha? And what if in wholeheartedly choosing the “one thing” our lives are enlarged and together we begin responding to the needs of one another and the world?

I suspect that wholehearted presence is a key to choosing “the better part.” When we’re wholehearted the divided parts of our lives reunite. Choosing “the better part” is not, however, a one-time choice. It’s a choice made in a particular set of circumstances. So, we must hold our choice lightly so when the context changes or other circumstances present themselves, we can choose the next “better part.” Otherwise, we just continue living as distracted drivers.

When you look at all the many tasks and distractions in your life today what is the “one thing” for you, “the better part?” What would it take to be a little more wholeheartedly present? What would give you some traction these days?

We certainly do live in a time when the worries and distractions are all around us. It is all too easy to become bitter and resentful in our world today, and to let fear and worry crowd out love and forgiveness. It is all too easy to find ourselves being dragged down by what is around us, being pulled apart from all these things.

Today's gospel reading is a timely reminder to us to take time each day to re-attach ourselves to what truly matters. To spend time with God in prayer, to sit at Jesus' feet. And take time each week to be re-attached to God through our Sunday worship. These are the things that will keep us from being worried and distracted by so many things.

But then, after we are re-attached to what matters, we are called to go and serve our neighbor in need, to go and show God's love and mercy and grace and kindness to everyone we encounter. We can help the world stay connected to what truly matters, by bringing Jesus' love to all those around us. We can choose the better part, which will not be taken away from us. And we can this for the glory of God. Amen.