

Sermon: **“Where is the Life We Have Lost in Living?”**

Text: Luke 10:38-42

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I'm drawn to the statement:

“Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying.”

We're living in what Douglas John Hall of McGill University called “a hyper-communication society. He says, “The silence that is needed for words to have meaning is wanting.”

It seems to me that we may be moving beyond what has been called the information age to the age of twitter. I looked it up. To *twitter* is “to utter a succession of small tremulous noises. To talk lightly and rapidly, especially of trivial matters – chatter. To be excited or agitated.” Sounds like the cable news channels! Indeed, “the silence that is needed for words to have meaning is wanting.” Someone else said that “the disease of the internet age is continuous partial attention.”

“Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying.”

She sat at Jesus' feet, suggesting the posture of a disciple, or a student. She listened, suggesting the attitude of a learner. It suggests some time, sitting down a while. It suggests the focus of full attention; really listening.

Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. In contrast, her sister Martha was worried and distracted by many things. She was busy with all the preparations that had to be made; all the tasks of hospitality. Realizing that Mary was just sitting there enjoying the company of Jesus, Martha complains, “Jesus, don't you care that Mary has left me to do all the work? Tell her to help me.” But Jesus replies, “Martha, you are worried and distracted by so many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part which will not be taken away from her.

Now, it may sound to some that Jesus is demeaning Martha's hard work. It may be that Mary is the quiet sort, more contemplative and relational. And Martha may be more practical, the activist; a get-it-done sort of person. It takes both kinds, as we say, to make the world go 'round. So it might be argued that we need deeds as well as words; acting as well as thinking; doing as well as hearing. After all, didn't Jesus challenge us to be doers of the word and not hearers only? And Luke, in verses just prior to this lesson, told us of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, who is praised for being a doer; who's compassion led him to action.

That's a good and valid point. But I think we would make a mistake if we play one against the other. We need both contemplation and action. Our current president gets criticized for thinking too much and not doing enough. His predecessor got criticized for doing things without thinking. Thoughtless activism will lead to aimless doing. Discussion alone can become a substitute for not following through with action. It's good advice to think before you speak or act. But having come to thoughtful and prayerful conclusion, for goodness sake, act.

But all that said, Jesus is not chiding Martha for being an activist or of doing so much. He is concerned that what she is doing, all good in and of itself, is distracting her from him. She is anxious and worried. She is coming apart over it all; fragmented and upset.

Martha says to Jesus, “Don't you *care*?” Of course Jesus cares. The Greek word used here indicates a proper concern.

Jesus says to Martha, “I care, but you're *worried*. The Greek word used here indicates anxiety.

The real lesson in this story is this. Martha had welcomed Jesus into her home. But the sad irony is that all the things she was working at so hard, in order to insure good hospitality for

her guest, were the very things that worked against her purpose for inviting Jesus in the first place. She was distracted from Jesus himself. All her service for him distracted her from him.

I say it's a sad irony. What she was doing was all good service; all good ministry. But it was void of any real relationship with the one she served. As a result, there was no joy in her service. Her focus was not on her guest; not on Jesus. Her focus was turned in on herself. "Jesus, don't you care that I'm doing all the work myself? Shouldn't someone be helping me?" She seems to feel sorry for herself. She's critical of Mary. She's unhappy with Jesus. And there is no joy in her service.

In true service to Christ, we forget ourselves. The true glory of ministry is not attached to what we're doing.

Don't allow the many good tasks that you do here at the Kellogg Church in the service of Jesus Christ to distract you from the very purpose of being a part of this church body. Don't allow your service for Jesus Christ task-wise, to distract you from Jesus Christ relationally. It's a very easy thing to let happen. It's a sad irony if all our human effort to prosper and expand the church, frustrates our confidence and hope in Christ himself.

Jesus told Martha that Mary had chosen something better. Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. To do that is to put yourself in a position of stillness; in a quiet frame of mind, with an open ear and heart; listening for words beyond your own.

You've got to choose to do that. "Mary has chosen what is better." It takes a deliberate choice. If not, we become the victims of all the many things; the expedient things; the important things. All these things just keep happening and we are drawn from one task to the next, till we are multi-tasking and we end up doing a juggling act with it all. We get lost in all our good ministries because we lose touch with the one we seek so to serve. Our lives become so filled, yet unfulfilled. We live a lifestyle void of life itself. And we end up asking with T.S. Eliot, "Where is the life we have lost in living?"

*Dear Lord, and God of humankind forgive our foolish ways.
Re-clothe us in our rightful minds,
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence praise.*

*Drop thy still dews of quietness till all our strivings cease.
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.*

-- John Greenleaf Whittier