



from the desk of . . .

Rande Wayne Smith

D.Min., Th.M., M.Div.

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## DOING THE RIGHT THING

Luke 10:38-42

I've told you on numerous occasions that as I read the accounts in Scripture, I put myself into the story.

I pretend I'm one of the characters.

If I'm reading about Adam & Eve ... I'm Adam. If I'm reading about Jacob & Esau ... I'm Jacob. If I'm reading about Joseph & Mary ... I'm Joseph. I'm one of the shepherds. I'm one of the Magi. I'm one of John the baptizer's followers. If I'm reading about the disciples ... I'm John. I'm Jairus, whose daughter has died.

Sometimes I'm the Prodigal Son, & at other times, I'm the older brother. I'm Peter, walking on the water.

I'm Silas, in prison with Paul.

That way the Scriptures come alive for me. And the lessons that God wants to teach,

I'm better able to apply to my life.

This is particularly true when it comes to the story that we're going to be looking at this morning. It's actually about my favorite female character in Scripture.

I'm talking about Martha.

So, my challenge to each of you is, as I read the account of her & her sister, Mary ... imagine that you're in Bethany. Pretend that you're one of these 2 incredible women. Put yourself in their house as Jesus & His disciples come for a visit ... & you'll discover God has a particular word for you this morning.

Okay, are you visualizing the scene? ...

Listen now to Good News, as recorded by Luke, to you who have gathered here for worship at C.C.R.M.

Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

As Jesus and his disciples went on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him in her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat down at the feet of the Lord and listened to his teaching. Martha was upset over all the work she had to do, so she came and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me!"

The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha! You are worried and troubled over so many things, but just one is needed. Mary has chosen the right thing, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

**May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen**

After long hours of ministry, have you ever wondered what Jesus did in the evenings? ... One day, early on in His ministry, some would-be followers came to Him asking what were some of the "fringe" benefits of discipleship.

Jesus told them that ... (X)

"Foxes have holes, & birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lie down & rest." (Matthew 8:20)

So, there were obviously times in His life when He slept out in the fields. But there were other times that Jesus enjoyed the warmth & hospitality of good friends. And probably no home in all of Israel was more special to Him than that of Martha, Mary, & their brother Lazarus, in the village of Bethany.

No matter how Jesus was received other places ... the door of this house was always open to Him.

Well, on one of His journeys to Jerusalem, word reaches Martha that Jesus is in the area, (Bethany's just a couple of miles away). (John 11:18) So, she insists that He & His disciples come to her home for dinner. She wants to extend warm hospitality. She wants to show, through her generosity, just how much she loves Him.

I've been around long enough to know, that for many women, when guests come to your home, it's a big deal; it can be kind of stressful. And here come 13 guys!

After all these years, I'm still in awe with what Kathy can do in the kitchen. She puts cold food in the refrigerator at one time, & hot food on the stove at another time, & it all comes together at the same time.

And then I sit down & have a good time.

And terrific cooks can always pull this off. So, here's Martha trying do her thing in the kitchen ...  
but it's not going very well.

The stove was giving off a lot more smoke than heat. The bread wasn't rising. And pretty soon the whole thing smelled more like a burnt offering for Jesus than a dinner.

And finally, she looked for her sister Mary to come & help her. Martha peaks in the living room & there she was ... sitting at Jesus' feet! And now, perturbed, she went back into the kitchen ... as burned up as the dinner.

And pretty soon that volcano inside began to erupt. And so, she stormed into the living room & went right up to Jesus ...

"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come & help me!"

I'm sure she thought that Jesus would come to her defense, praise her for her efforts, & then gently rebuke Mary & send her into the kitchen to help get this elaborate dinner on the table.

But instead ...

"Martha, Martha! You are worried & troubled over so many things, but just one is needed. Mary has chosen the right thing, & it will not be taken away from her."

Now you don't have to go to Seminary to understand that story. We all know that Martha made the **bad** choice & Mary made the **good** choice.

But, even though I know that that's the truth being taught here ... my head & my heart don't agree. I confess to you that I'm very sympathetic with Martha. To be honest ... she's my kind of woman. Martha's realistic. She approaches life as it is.

She calls them as she sees them.

John writes about the time that Martha's brother, Lazarus, died. Jesus arrives 4 days after the funeral. And when He finally does show up, they take Him out to the tomb ... & He asks that the stone be taken away.

And Martha, even though she was submerged in grief, says ... "Lord, you better not do that." "There will be a bad smell. He has been buried 4 days!" (John 11:39)  
Not very couth ... but pretty realistic.

Martha was just that kind of woman.

And she was realistic enough to know that if you're going to get a dinner ready for 16+ people,  
there's lots to be done.

Sitting around at somebody's feet  
won't get the food prepared.

I read this story, & then I look for help in my commentaries ... & they're all into Mary; the sweet sister who sits at Jesus' feet, & reads the Bible, & all this holy stuff. And Martha comes off as some kind of ogre.

Yet, I recognize, if it wasn't for the Martha's of the world ... nothing much would get done.

Very few sermons would get prepared & preached.  
Very few missions would be undertaken.  
If it wasn't for the Martha's ... evangelism wouldn't exist.

I don't know of a Pastor who doesn't want a bunch of Martha's in his/her congregation.

Martha's my kind of woman. And I'm not the only one who feels that way. Writer, Rudyard Kipling (X) wrote a poem entitled, "The Sons Of Martha."  
Listen to the final stanza ...

And the Sons of Mary smile & are blessèd -  
they know the Angels are on their side.  
They know in them is the Grace confessèd,  
& for them are the Mercies multiplied.  
They sit at the feet - they hear the Word -  
they see how truly the Promise runs.  
They have cast their burden upon the Lord, & -  
the Lord He lays it on Martha's Sons!

I have real sympathy for Martha. But when we look at the story we have to give her low marks for serving.

I mean, Jesus isn't wrong in that.

We know that because of the context of the previous story that Luke has included ... The Parable Of The Good Samaritan. And in that story, which we looked at a couple of weeks ago ... our **neighbor** is anyone we see whose need we're in a position to **meet**.

And certainly, in this story ... Martha is being a neighbor. She recognizes that Jesus & His men have been on the road quite some time. They're hungry. And she has the gift of hospitality, & she wants to meet their need, & give them a good homecooked meal.

That's the kind of woman Martha was. Wherever she went, from her hands were the deeds of kindness & love which makes life bearable for other people. I believe that acts of graciousness just poured out from her life.

I imagine that Martha was the kind of person who when a child was ill would come by & sit a spell while the mother got some rest. If a family was sick she was the one who would bring a crock of cream of mushroom soup.

And right here, Martha wants to show her hospitality to Jesus & His disciples. She wanted to give them the kind of lavish meal they would not soon forget.

They would know that they were loved & cared for.  
That's what Martha was doing ... being a neighbor.

And Jesus is not faulting her for that.

The difficulty that Jesus does seem to point out is not the **service** ... but the **spirit of the service**. Luke writes that she ...

"was upset over all the work she had to do."

And when Jesus responded ... "Martha, Martha! You are worried & troubled over so many things."

It was her spirit that Jesus was concerned about.

My guess is that Martha had a "type A" personality ... obsessive, compulsive ... (which is maybe why I kind of identify with her). And for us obsessive, compulsive people, our code of the road is ...

"if a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing well."

And Martha totally buys into that. She wants to show hospitality. She not only has to prepare a lavish menu, but it's got to be in a sterile environment. The house has to be clean. Dust & vacuum, i.e. And we ask ...

"why are you doing all that?"

Martha says ... "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well."

And Jesus responds ... "Martha, Martha, you're worried & troubled over so many things. One dish would have been enough. That's all you really had to prepare.

You need to relax, & reevaluate your priorities."

What Jesus is saying is something some of us need to hear & then underline. That if a thing is worth doing, it may be worth doing ... simply.

If it's worth doing ... it may be worth doing **simply**.

Certainly, it's a good thing to show hospitality. But, if you're driven by hospitality to superhuman feats, & your spirit is wrong ... you need to know that maybe soup & a sandwich would have been better.

Hospitality is worth doing ... but it may be worth doing simply. If we were traveling on the Jericho Road we certainly needed to stop & lend a hand. (Luke 10:36-37) But that doesn't mean we have to start a Jericho Road Aid Society to help all accident victims.

Sometimes helping one neighbor is all we can handle. If it's worth doing ... it may be worth doing simply. We need to understand that.

Simplifying life can be a very important strategy.

The question, of course, is ... how do we know when we're too busy? How do we know when we've pushed ourselves beyond the limits? ...

The answer is going to be different for different people.

But one conclusion would be ... when what we do has driven us to distraction, & we're upset & anxious & irritable & hard to get along with ...

that's a clear clue that we need to simplify things.

The problem is that we often mess it up in the way we do our service. Because doing ministry in a bad spirit doesn't do anybody any good.

The old saying ... "misery loves company" ... I'm not so sure. But I do know that misery "spoils" the company & the party for everybody else. And that happened here.

Martha's irritation spoiled the party for Mary.

Can you imagine how she felt? ... Martha's upset. And she doesn't just tiptoe to the door & whisper, "Mary, please come & help me." No, she makes a grandstand entrance. She steamrolls into the room, & doesn't even speak to Mary. She goes right up to Jesus, & blurts out in front of everyone ...

"I'm out there doing everything by myself. Tell Mary to get off her behind & get in the kitchen & help me."

Can you imagine how Mary must have felt? ... She's embarrassed. Here this lovely evening with Jesus has been spoiled. When we're irritable we ruin it for everybody. Martha spoiled the meal for the disciples.

I remember, when my kids were little, going to someone's home for a dinner party. Well, upon arrival it was immediately obvious that the hosts had had a "fight" just before we arrived. They were horribly irritable. I found myself praying that my babysitter would call saying there was an emergency at home so that I would have a good excuse to get out of there.

Most importantly, Martha's irritation spoiled her relationship with the Lord.

This was going to be a sterling evening in her life.

Here, in her home was, by her own admission, the Messiah. (John 11:27)

And she had the unique opportunity to "entertain" Him.

But now suddenly, because of her irritation, she's angry with Him. She storms into the living room ...

"Lord, don't you care about me, & the fact that I've got to do this whole meal by myself?"

Strangely enough, for that evening at least, Martha would have been **better off** if she hadn't **known** Jesus. She would have had a better spirit if Jesus hadn't shown up in her home, or in her life. Because instead of serving joyfully ... she's irritated with Him. (Deuteronomy 28:47)

When irritation is part of our service ... we've just **spoiled** our **service**. When we're overextended in what we do in good works ... it's done with a bad attitude.

At that point we better hear the word of Jesus ...  
"one dish would have been enough."

If a thing is worth doing ... it may be worth doing simply.

Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. Certainly, there are moments in life when we must reach to our best effort (Colossians 3:23) ...

but wise is the person who knows when those times are.

And if you can prepare a 7-course meal & do it with great delight & warm hospitality ... I'm available to come to your house! I prefer special dinners to soup & salad.

But, if I have to choose between a good meal & a bad spirit & a simple meal with a good spirit ... I'll take the soup & sandwich anytime. Some of us have got to understand that,

if a thing is worth doing ... it may be worth doing simply.

But that's not the end of the story, is it? ... Jesus isn't telling all of us that we need to cut back on our service or work. I don't think we've improved much if we've turned away from Christian ministry in order to spend more time watching TV.

Look at the final sentence in the story. Jesus says ...

"Mary has chosen the right thing,  
& it will not be taken away from her."

What Mary did was sit at Jesus' feet & hear His words. Okay, so the question is, what's Jesus talking about? ... Well, He doesn't necessarily mean that we're to become a Bible expert, or even spend every spare moment reading the Scriptures,

or listening to every preacher on TV or the radio.

The parable of the Good Samaritan resulted from a conversation Jesus had with a theologian. That man knew the Bible. He could quote the Scriptures ... (X)

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, & with all your mind’; & ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’” (Luke 10:27)

Those were statements every good Jewish leader would quote each morning before leaving their homes. So, the priest & the Levite in Jesus’ parable would have done that. But, simply reciting those words had absolutely no impact that day on what happened on the Jericho road.

Now knowing the Bible is important ... but that’s not what it means to sit at Jesus’ feet & hear His words.

To hear His word is to allow Him to minister to us. To allow Him to do something in us before we do something for Him.

Jesus said that ... “Mary has chosen the right thing.” Because before a ministry of service ... there has to be a ministry to our spirits.

The 2 commands are ... “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, & with all your mind’; & ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’” But those commands are always in that order.

If we get them turned around they’ll destroy us.

If we put our focus on loving our neighbor ... that gets to be a pretty gritty business. Trying to love our neighbor is like trying to drain Lake Michigan with a cup.

We dip & dip & dip & dip & dip ... & when we finish we have a puddle at our feet & Lake Michigan's still there.

If we focus solely on "neighbor love" we'll burn out. It's only a "neighbor love" that grows out of a love for Jesus Christ that has staying power. (1 John 4:19) Before we become involved with service for **others** we must allow Jesus to serve **us**.

And believe it or not, that's what He wants from us. He didn't bring us to Himself to make us a slave. He brought us to Himself to make us a friend. (John 15:15) The sovereign God of the universe **enjoys fellowship** with us.

Mary chose the right thing because that's what Jesus wanted when He came to their home that day.

A # of years ago I had a chance to spend an evening with 2 friends I hadn't seen for some time. They went out of their way to show me hospitality. Marty knew what my favorite food was & she made it. It was an absolutely wonderful meal. She was back & forth to the kitchen anytime she sensed that I might need something.

She was thoughtful & gracious. And I appreciated it.

When the evening was over & I went back to the Hotel it occurred to me, as terrific as the dinner had been, I had spent time with David, but I hadn't really had quality time with her. I missed that. And the farther removed I am from that ... the more I realize it.

Hear me when I say that I truly appreciated the hospitality, & I knew that it came from a heart that loved me. But that evening, when it was all over, I would have preferred something simple, so that I could have spent time with her along with David.

Unless we allow God to **minister** to us ...  
we will not be able to effectively **minister** to others.

Many years ago, I heard Dr. Harry Hager, who was a longtime Pastor of Christian Reformed Church in Chicago tell a story about a couple in his Church ... a mother & her son. The father had died when the boy was young & as a result the boy & his Mom had developed a deep committed relationship.

Well, when he was in his early 20's he met a gal & fell in love with her. They decided they wanted to get married. Realizing how expensive housing was here in Chicago the mother told them ... "we have a 2-story house. I'll make a separate apartment on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, & you & your bride can have this home. But the only thing I ask is that we continue to spend some time together."

"Oh yeah, you can be sure of that."

So, the couple were married. And for a while the boy would stop up several times a week ... but then he got busy. And before long, it was every couple of weeks there would be a simple phone call from downstairs.

But then his mother had a birthday & the young man went out & bought her a lovely dress. He knew her size. And on her birthday, he gave it to her. She opened it.

"Thank you, son, I appreciate it so much."

"Mother, you don't like it."

"Yes, I do. It's my color, thank you."

"Mother, I have the sales slip, I can take it back."

"I do like it, it's a lovely dress."

"Mother, we've been together too long. What's wrong?"

The woman walked over to her closet & opened it.

"Son, I have enough dresses to last me for the rest of my life, to be honest, I don't want yours ... I want you."

I hear God saying that to me this week.

"Rande, Rande, (Martha) ... I want you."

Okay, I began this message by asking you to put yourself in the story. Imagine you are Martha or Mary. (X)

Are you sitting there at Jesus' feet? ... Or are you out in the kitchen? ... Are you being regularly ministered to by Him? ... Or are you becoming overwhelmed in your service to Him? ...

So, the question for each of you as you listened to the sermon this morning ... what is God saying to you? ...

**MARANA THA**