

**Date: Sunday July 18, 2010**

**Scripture: Luke 10:38-42**

**Title: “To Do or Not To Do”**

**The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): Mary sits and listens to Jesus and Martha is running around hardly attentive to Jesus. How does this scenario apply to our lives?**

**The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): Jesus comes to us, not to be served but to serve.**

**(Remember, it’s all about God!)**

I mentioned last month about our being in the midst of the travel season. The deeper we move into summer, the more travel experiences we have to share. Many of us in this congregation have already taken vacation trips. Some will be taking vacations in the coming weeks, and a few have already taken a vacation and will be taking another trip. As I have said before, vacation and travel are enjoyable. My dad often says, “It’s good to get away if only for a couple of days.”

Well, it seems to me that there are a couple of kinds of vacations. There are those where the goal is to try and do as much as possible in the time that is allotted. This might mean trying to see six European countries in seven days or playing five different outdoor sports in a four day weekend. The other type of vacation is the relaxation model. This is the one where there is no schedule, and a beach blanket or porch chair are the only necessities. I am not advocating one over the other. I have done both. There is certainly a time and place for each one. But perhaps we could be more intentional about when it is right for us to choose one style over the other. Maybe we could be more focused on the question, what is it that we need most in

our life at a particular time?

I'm offering this vacation comparison today because we could refer to these two types of vacations as the Mary and Martha styles of travel. A Mary style of vacation would be the one with the emphasis upon relaxation and quiet time. The Martha style of vacation is go, go, go, and do, do, do. Of course this is what we are finding in today's Gospel passage from Luke. Martha is up and around, seeing that everything is getting done. Mary is sitting; relaxed at the feet of Jesus. There is a time and a place for both actions. The question becomes, which do we need more in our life right now?

A women's group at a church decided they would do a service project. Someone in the group had read about various missionary hospitals in Africa and suggested that since every hospital needs bandages, their group should make bandages to send. Without much more discussion the ladies decided that every week, they would get together and cut up old bed sheets and then roll the strips into bandages and send them off to Africa. After doing that for more than a year, they received a letter back from the hospital where they had been sending all the bandages. The letter said: "Thank you for all the bandages that you've been sending us. We hope that you won't be too upset that we've taken those strips of bandages and sewed them into bed sheets, because bed sheets are what we need the most."

That church group was doing things in the Martha way. Martha's attitude was that when in doubt, don't just sit there, do something. But sometimes we run into

problems when we concentrate so much on doing stuff that we don't take enough time up front to ask, listen, and discover what it is that really needs to be done.

It's like the story I read this week about a roofer in Newbury Park, California, who was hired to replace a roof. He went to 949 Pons Court Road and ripped the roof off. Now that doesn't sound like such a newsworthy event. But the problem was that he was supposed to rip off the roof of 948 Pons Court Road, the house across the street (Bowen).

In this morning's passage, it's clear that Jesus is saying that instead of rushing around and doing stuff all the time like Martha, we need to make sure that we spend time listening to Jesus like Mary. As I said last week, there is a time for faithful action and faithful inaction. That message is getting reinforced today. But to clarify, is Jesus saying that we should spend our entire lives like Mary, and never do anything?

Of course, that's not the case. The solution is to do some of both. The question is which do we need in our life right now. And the quandary becomes what we do first. It is the old chicken and egg riddle at the heart of today's passage and in our faith community life together. Do we do what we think needs to be done and then spend time with Jesus, or do we spend time with Jesus and then do the work we are called to do?

Think about all this in terms of our worship here on Sunday mornings. Do we view this as, we've been at work and busy all week, and so after a full week, we

want to come to church to try to put the pieces back together? Or do we see church as being at the start of our week; a chance for us to hear God's voice, so that we can get an idea of what God wants us to be doing during the next six days? There are some of you that see it the first way and others see it the second way. There's application for both, but the lesson for today is that Jesus wants us to understand it that second way. Listen to God; then having heard what God wants us to do, go out and get it done (Bowen).

The Jewish/Buddhist author Sylvia Boorstein writes in her book, "That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist" that when life gets overwhelming and she takes on too many tasks, she finds that she needs to slow down and increase her prayer life. That can seem incongruent. Often when life overtakes us, prayer is one of the first things to go. Sylvia says that prayer not only strengthens the mind, but our whole being (Annual Manual). A big part of prayer is listening for God. On this day that we conclude Vacation Bible school with the theme, "Praise Party – Worshipping God with our Whole Being" it is a good reminder that we need our whole being if we truly want to do the work of God.

But in our humanity, of those two actions we are considering this morning—listening and doing—I imagine that most of us have a much harder time with the listening part. After all, how often do we get praised for our ability to sit and listen?—Almost never. Instead, we're constantly getting judged according to what we do. Students are valued according to what they get on their report cards. The worth of a team member is based on how well they contribute to winning the game. Or in

business, it's the people who produce the right results that get promoted.

But the problem when we focus on doing, doing, doing is that eventually we can hit a point that we would call "burn-out." I find it interesting that the term, "burn-out," is connected to a monastery in Africa where lepers were being treated. Leprosy is a painful disease that causes, in addition to sores on the skin, a sudden wild burning sensation. But when the burning vanishes—the monks would say that it had burned out. That seems good, on the surface, but the down side is that when that happens, the nervous system doesn't work anymore, so that there's no longer any feeling at all. The lepers who had burned out had no feeling left (Bowen).

The burn-out we know isn't caused by leprosy but still leaves us without feeling. The burn-out we know usually results when we try to be constantly going and doing and helping and serving, until all of a sudden, there's nothing left. We don't get the results we expect or the praise we planned. We didn't listen enough upfront to know what to do and then when things turn out differently than we thought, we wonder, what's the point? Why try? We're not going to do anything anymore because we are not appreciated. The blame is always on the other person, never on us. We are tired, we are burned out, and we just aren't able or don't care, to go on. We have no feeling left. As Jesus looked at Martha, that's the danger he saw for her.

With all of the running around that we so often do, we need to remember that Jesus said: "I came not to be served, but to serve." Do we hear that? I came not to be served, but to serve. That's today's good news. Jesus isn't so interested in us

doing things for him as he is in doing things for us. Just as Jesus told Martha not to worry about preparing a meal for him, that's what Jesus says to us. Jesus will prepare the meal. Yes, there is a time for us to help, to serve, to care. But right now is this time for us to sit, to listen, and to eat . . . sit, listen, and take in the words that Jesus Christ shares with us.

With special word of blessing for this travel season, let us pray.

Lord,

We are ready to go. We want to get something done. But what is it you want us to do? We will try and wait to listen for your word before we just act. That's not always easy, but it is the way of faith. And it is the way we pray today, Amen.

Offering: Our offering supports this faith community which provides for us a place to listen for the Lord and then to act in the Lord's name. Let us give accordingly, the ushers will please . . .

Dedication: With this offering we dedicate ourselves for your work. We hope our work carries forth your good word. So we pray, Amen.

Benediction: Go forth this day with a spirit of quiet contemplation and bold praise. Go forth this day blessed by the love of Jesus Christ. Go forth. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Bowen, Edward C.; Lectionary Homiletics; [www.goodpreacher.com](http://www.goodpreacher.com); 2010.  
Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.

