

A pastor, Fred Craddock, preached a sermon near a university, full of undergraduate, graduate, and even medical students. They were busy being the Martha's of the world, likely hoping for a short sermon and a cup of coffee before departing.

After the service Craddock was greeted by a woman in the reception line. She said to him, "Finally, I have the answer I was asking God for. I know what I am going to do with my life." Thrilled, he smiled at her and said, "wonderful, tell me more." She responded, "I am going to quit medical school and teach underprivileged children in the Rio Grande." And that is exactly what she did.¹

This story reminds us that we do not always know what or how Christ will call us to be his disciples. We do know that we must prepare our hearts for this task. In today's gospel we encounter two women who are giving to God in different ways. Mary quietly sits and listens to Jesus. Martha is busy working on hosting Jesus.

One important note about this section of Luke's Gospel is that we are unsure of what order the story happens. Earlier, when I told you about the medical student, I gave a chronological order to the story.

For Luke, this is not the way in which the story of Jesus' is told. Our Gospel writer places an emphasis on more important things: learning from Jesus.²

The message Jesus is not against hospitality. Jesus consistently affirms the role of hospitality throughout Luke's gospel.³ Instead, Jesus is emphasizing the importance of being fully present in what you are doing.

The scene is exactly as it "should" be in many ways. Still, there are hints that something is amiss. The setting, 2000+ years later, feels serene, with Martha welcoming Jesus into her home.⁴ This in and of itself was actually quite controversial. At this time, in this place, it was a bit unusual for women to own homes in their own right to be unconnected to a male such as her brother Lazarus. Still, Martha began to do what she was taught: to work in the kitchen.

In this gospel there are three people breaking cultural norms. Mary has broken custom by sitting at Jesus' feet, which was the pose of a disciple, and many rabbis in that era didn't allow female disciples. Martha has invited Jesus and spoken up against her sister in front of a guest, was definitely against the cultural norms.

Of course who is the one who lit the fire under both of them? Jesus. He is encouraging and challenging Martha and Mary to continue to break these cultural boundaries.⁵ He is encouraging them to do what is right while ignoring what others might see as taboo.

Here we have a moment where Jesus directly addresses Martha, and it is possible that his conversation is not purely out of controversy. He is offering her an invitation.

Bishop Doyle wonders if Jesus is asking Martha to become a disciple.⁶ After all, disciples are the ones who sit and listen at Jesus' feet. Personally, this sounds as though it is the right idea

¹ This story is reworded and is based on Fred B. Craddock's story in *Craddock Stories*. P.52-53. I gave it some new words, but the essence is the same. Reverend Dr. Craddock is a former professor and pastor.

² Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.552-566

³ Johnson, E. (2013). July 20, 2013. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-16-3/commentary-on-luke-1038-42-3>

⁴ Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.552-566

⁵ Stone, M. (2020).. *Living on the Plain*. New York: Church Publishing

⁶ Doyle, C.A. (2019). Proper 11C. <http://hitchhikingthebible.blogspot.com/search?q=Proper+11C>

to me. Jesus breaks what we think we know about society and places it upside down to what society should look like, and he is doing this thousands of years ago with a woman.

Jesus is making disciples. Luke's Gospel is not always thought of as an evangelical Gospel, however, in this example it surely is. Jesus looks at these women and sees disciples. One woman, Mary, follows him instantly. She sits at his feet, demonstrating the posture of a disciple.

In this scripture, Jesus gives us a lesson on patience. Going back to that medical student we heard about earlier, she had been contemplating leaving medical school for some time, and she waited. I suspect she had many fears and worries, yet she continued to listen. This is one aspect of Martha that needs to be addressed. She was worried to the point of distraction about the food they were going to serve Jesus.

I am not saying that food is unimportant, rather, I am saying that it is not the only important aspect of what is happening.⁷ In my imagining of this biblical scene, if Martha were to put down the ladle and listen rather than stir the pot, she might discover the answer to her concerns: focus on God's love for all.

Then a sudden outburst upsets the applecart. Luke tells us Martha comes in and says, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me."⁸ Perhaps Martha is feeling so exhausted that she is willing to embarrass her sister and tell Jesus what to do.

Next, we have, "The voice of authority,"⁹ also known as Jesus. The tone of Jesus' voice in this section is key to what he says next. He repeats Martha's name twice. This indicates to me that he is either scolding her or speaking gently. Perhaps in this section Jesus is doing both at the same time. Just as when we are headed in the wrong direction, Jesus gently corrects our ways. Though the correction must happen. It is necessary for Martha to know that she is called to something else.

The world we live in today is equally busy.¹⁰ How many times have you felt that your productivity rather than God's grace defines you? It is not the amount of money, or the fantastic parties that make you superb. No one in heaven is looking at how many merits your children have earned in school. The grace of God is here for us to take regardless if we ace chemistry or fail it with flying colors. We can be Christ's disciples and be evangelists if we listen to his message of love and hope.

Jesus was redrawing the boundaries of who could be a disciple.

I recognize that I am fairly biased on the topic, as I stand here as an ordained Episcopal priest, however, I think at this moment Jesus is saying anyone can be a leader in this new world order. He is not limiting himself to these Jewish men. Martha and Mary have a place at my table as well.¹¹

This scripture is a challenge to listen more and to lean into the discomfort of this restful time with Jesus. This can be hard for type A personalities. Can we find a way to be still and rest at the feet of Jesus? Even if we start small, by giving one minute of your day to Jesus, like Mary,

⁷ Johnson, E. (2013). July 20, 2013. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-16-3/commentary-on-luke-1038-42-3>

⁸ Luke 10:40

⁹ Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.552-566

¹⁰ Johnson, E. (2013). July 20, 2013. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-16-3/commentary-on-luke-1038-42-3>

¹¹ Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

that's a start. And you might enjoy this time enough to increase it. My suspicion is that if we take time to be with Jesus, to sit still, we will find worries and distractions, while still present, don't have as much power. We may be more in tune with what Jesus wants for you in your life.¹²

Each moment you spend in stillness with the Lord ask yourself, what is needed? Look at your life and ask what is necessary and what can be pruned? Look at yourself and know that God made you for goodness and for that reason you are treasured. Amen.

¹² Stone, M. (2020).. *Living on the Plain*. New York: Church Publishing