

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 17, 2022, Year C

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 10:38-42

***"A Delicate Balance"***

As we read last Sunday, Jesus used the parable of "The Good Samaritan" to show how we should love our neighbor and now He uses the story of two sisters, today, Martha, and Mary, to illustrate how we should love God. Today's Holy Gospel reading takes place in the village of Bethany, which is located just outside of Jerusalem on the other side of the Mount of Olives. Martha lived with her sister Mary and their later to be famous brother, Lazarus. Here in their home, Jesus and his disciples sit down, getting away from the crowds. Jesus is among friends, and He will be able to relax and "let His hair down", in a place that apparently He had been many times. Both sisters are delighted to see Jesus but they express their enthusiasm in very different ways.

You know, all people are different; some are active - always on the go, never able to sit still while others are more contemplative, willing to sit back and think things through. Martha is a very activity-oriented person, always on the go. Her sister Mary appeared to be of the more contemplative nature, able to sit down and listen to what Jesus has to say. Quite often we have contrasted Martha and Mary, as though each Christian should make a choice to either be a worker bee like Martha or a worshipper like Mary. But in so doing I think we miss the point; the Lord wants each of us to imitate Mary in our worship and Martha in our work, and then we have to find and to try to achieve a delicate balance in both.

Mary is very content to sit at Jesus' feet, soaking up the Word, and not "do" anything, but her big sister, Martha was looking around at all the guests and saw the need to prepare a meal. Martha was obviously a great hostess; she got up and began to prepare food for Jesus and all those that were there with Him. Martha looked and said to herself "What a privilege to prepare a meal for the Master!" Mary on the other hand would have said, "What a privilege to sit at the feet of the Master." So let me ask you: Is one right and the other wrong? The answer to that is No! I truly believe that Duty and Devotion are both necessary but there has got to be a balance.

We can all relate to people who drop in at a moment's notice unannounced. Did you ever have that happen? The doorbell rings and you think - who the hey heck is that? Oh my goodness, what do I have to serve them? We have all been through that. You can see why Martha is feeling more and more frustrated. Verse 40 tells us, "*But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.*" Martha wanted to hear Jesus herself too, and she wanted to be seated at His feet too, but she was pulled away by what she considered her duties. Worrying about the meal robbed her of the joy of her service to the Lord. We are to be serious about what we are called to do, but not to the point that we overestimate our importance. The problem was not in the work that Martha was doing. It was the attitude that became the problem. Martha's problem was one of balance, between the going and doing and the sitting and listening. The difference between Martha and Mary is not that one served and the other did not, but one served out of duty and the other out of devotion. In today's day and age - if we're busy, we're important; if we're not busy, we're just too embarrassed to admit it.

I really believe that Martha wanted to honor Jesus and I believe that she began her work with the right attitude. Martha, the harder she worked the more upset she became. Some people “burn out” in service but Martha was “burned up” in hers. It is bad enough to have everything to do, but it is even worse when we can think of someone who could have offered to help –but didn’t. Tension and frustration mount when we are performing the wrong tasks or trying to cram too many of the right activities into a given period. Then we develop a critical spirit and we begin to judge and condemn others for what they do or don’t do. We can all be guilty of this, at some time or another.

In second part of verse forty, Martha finally exploded and she comes boiling out of the kitchen, red-faced and furious and says, “*Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!*” Martha does not even call her sister by name. She probably tried everything she could think of to attract Mary’s attention and tried to signal her that she needed help. Have you ever tried to signal somebody to get their attention and they are looking every which way but at you? You are going “come on” and they are just not listening.

Being in a situation at a dinner table and you try to get someone’s attention – to get them to go along with you – and then they respond, “why are you kicking me under the table?” We have a situation like that in this text when Martha cannot get Mary’s attention. She gets even more irritated when Mary ignored her and spent more attention at the feet of Jesus and that meant everything to her at this point. No one can force someone to be devout, it is a voluntary decision.

Martha was so peeve and angry at Mary for being so selfish and she was angry at Jesus for allowing this to go on. Notice that Martha addressed her irritation to Jesus. You have to admit that she has got a lot of chutzpah – or brass! Martha is accusing Jesus of not caring for her, because she thought that if Jesus really cared for her He would tell Mary to get up and help her. Can you just imagine how here blood pressure kept going up and up and up. Whenever our service causes us to criticize others and pity ourselves because we feel overworked, we had better take time to examine our priority in our lives!

It is interesting how Martha connects Jesus’ care for her with His willingness to tell Mary to get busy with helping her. Martha thought that she knew how Jesus should demonstrate His care for her. It makes you wonder: Do we ever accuse God of not caring for us because we have already decided what His care for us should look like? Part of the Martha’s problem was that she worried too much about what others were doing. It all boiled down to the fact that Martha wanted to force Mary to serve Christ her way.

In verse 41 and 42 Jesus responds to Martha, “*Martha, Martha,*” *the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."* Jesus shows great tenderness in not rebuking her for preparing for Him and the other guests and He is not rejecting Martha’s attempt to

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serve Him. Martha's problem was that she gave too much importance to it. Today we have to be careful that we do not let the necessary things that must be done get out of balance and distort our lives. The core of Martha's problem is that she was trying to impose her value system on Mary. It is either my way or the highway. Did you ever run into that?

Jesus did not tell Martha to do what Mary was doing. But it was Martha's attitude that needed correction, and that is why He said "*Martha, Martha.*" Martha's work was both good and necessary. The truth is that as believers, we need to cultivate both the Martha and the Mary in each of us. That becomes a delicate balance.

Unless we take time to spend time with Jesus personally and privately, we will soon end up like Martha busy but not blessed. Martha was not wrong and neither was Mary. It is a case of where one did good and the other did better. Our life is learning to balance duty and devotion. Sitting without serving is powerless; serving without sitting is directionless; serving after sitting produces power and balance – a delicate balance.

In the Gospel of John – we meet Martha and Mary once again, after their brother Lazarus had died. He had been in the tomb three days. Jesus arrived and was seeking to comfort her and told her, "*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?*" Her response is one of the greatest confessions of all time, for Martha replies, "*Yes, Lord,*" she told him, "*I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.*" She evidently had overcome her tendency to be distracted long enough and sat at the feet of Jesus enough to grow into a woman of profound faith.

I pray that the Lord would bless each one of us with the desire to serve and the devotion to worship, in a blessed, delicate balance that would serve to honor God – and draw us closer to His presence.