

And so here it is, the good old Mary and Martha story. Boy I love this story, for it's such a controversial and challenging piece of scripture. Almost every time I had a discussion with someone about this story there was some kind of argument or disagreement. In fact the ladies in my previous church had a women's retreat and this was one of the texts they discussed and I found out that it wasn't exactly smooth sailing.

What is it about this particular scripture that gets us so rowed up? (pause) Well let's take a look first at what the story is about. Jesus visits his friends Mary and Martha—and brought the disciples along with him. When they get there, Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me."

**Now this is the moment when most of us start to get annoyed with Mary, the sister that doesn't really care whether the things will get done, but instead hangs out with Jesus.** And we're kind of expecting Jesus to say, ok Mary now is the time to help your sister. (pause) How many times were you in a situation when something needed to be done and you worked really hard on it but there was someone else who was supposed to help, but they just didn't care, they sat on a couch watching TV, or just hung out doing nothing. And so you do it yourself, and the annoyance and anger are just building up. Now that's Martha. And all of us have this Martha in us. All of us have at some point experienced that feeling. You can ask my wife about it during this year's World Cup. ☺

And so Martha comes to Jesus and complains. Parents, how many times have you heard these complaints from your children: "They're not helping with..." Or husbands and wives, how many times have you said, can you for once get up off that couch and help me, or I'm doing everything by myself... That, my friends, is the Martha within us. Now this isn't the time to look at your spouse with a mean glare and say, see I told you... The point I'm trying to make is that all of us have experienced Martha's frustration in our lives. For a simple reason, things need to get done. And when you have help, it gets done faster.

**That's partially what this story is about, but this is not the main point of this story.** The main point is once again brought up by Jesus, who-surprise surprise-- puts a twist on things.

Instead of sending Mary to help her sister, Jesus says: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. And Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” Now this is the moment when many of us Marthas say: Are you kidding me?

And so what is Jesus trying to tell us by promoting what seems to be the selfish behavior of Mary? Is he saying that all we have to do is to pray, and read the Bible and everything else will take care of itself? In seminary we had a chaplain, who one day when we were talking about the importance of prayer shared with us a story. He said in my first call in the town where I served, they had problems with floods. One year the flood came and everyone in town was working really hard to save their houses, filling the sacks with sand to prevent the water from damaging their properties. And then I realized, said the chaplain that everyone was working but no one was praying, and so I called couple guys from the church and told them we need to get together and pray for God’s help and deliverance. And so they did. We all thought to ourselves, wow what a great idea. And then chaplain added, well the truth is that the basements of the guys that were praying with me were the only ones that got flooded and damaged, but it was good that they prayed. Well after that comment I thought to myself, they might have been better off if they would have been filling those sacks with sand.

**Yes, there are times in our lives, when we need to put our faith into action, when just praying or reading the Bible will not take care of everyday chores or things that need to be done.** We could have prayed for the Zumba family in Tecate Mexico or we could have sent them couple copies of Bible, but the walls of their house would not be standing today. I think we can all agree on this. **At the same time doing and working without the time spent with Jesus, won’t get us anywhere.** The thing Jesus points out about Martha is that she is too worried, and too distracted. She is too busy to spend even a little time with him. She’s trying to do the right thing, to serve, but it doesn’t fill her with joy and peace, instead she’s filled with frustration. Maybe she could have spend a couple minutes with Jesus in the beginning, talking with him, maybe have a laugh and some time to catch up and then she could have said, ok Mary, these things need to be done, let’s do them so we can both hang out with Jesus some more. The folks that went down to Mexico could have gone down and worked hard, build the house and

then left, but without the many prayers and the evening devotions they had together with one another and with Jesus, this experience would not have been the same. Am I right?

We all live such busy lives; there is no doubt about it. Work, school, sports, music, leisure, all kinds of volunteer community activities... When are we supposed to find time to sit at Jesus' feet listening to what he has to say? The point is about finding that much needed balance. It's about finding our spiritual groove. Jesus says here, if you keep going and won't find the time for me, you'll burn out, physically but especially spiritually. The life of a Christian is not easy, I'm a pastor and I struggle with it myself. There are days when the Martha in me totally takes over, and I go and go and do and do and don't find any fulfillment, instead I become more irritated and on edge. For I haven't found time to sit at Jesus' feet, I haven't started my day with prayer and devotion, I haven't thought of him and his blessings and haven't read his life giving word. On a day like that, I look back and all I see is empty busyness.

Jesus comes into our lives as well, just as he visited Mary and Martha. He tells us that he is here for us. That he is here to help us with our everyday battles and frustrations that he is here to give us his peace and strength. That he is here to fill our lives with his love and joy. But for him be able to do these things for us, we need to give him an opportunity to do so. We need to pause, and listen for a while. For example, when I have a busy morning, I'm running behind and I skip my devotions, I say I'll do it the first thing when I get to work, and then I put it off until the lunch break, and the days goes on, and so many things go wrong, and I'm frustrated, yelling at my kids, saying things I don't mean, I'm just not a pleasant person to be around and then finally I lay down at night, and I grab my devotional and read the text, and the text speaks directly to everything I experienced that day. I think to myself, if I only read this reading in the morning, if I only spend that time in prayer with Jesus, my whole day would have looked differently. Do you know what I'm talking about? I bet many of you have had days like this.

I know that after this sermon you won't stop struggling with your Mary Martha syndrome, it's deeply rooted in who we are. But my prayer is that each day we might give Mary a chance. That each day we'll say, Jesus this is for you, the time to talk, to pray, to read and to listen. My prayer is that each day of the week we'll be able to say, Lord this day belongs to you and thank you for it.

I just want to make one final point. This reading is not just about our individual lives. It is significant for the life of our church family. For it challenges us to grow closer to Jesus and to grow closer to one another. My hope is that our church family will be a family filled with Mary's, who are always eager to spend time with Jesus, through reading his word, praying for one another and spending time in fellowship. If we'll be able to make all these things a part of our lives, if we'll be able to make it a priority in the midst of our busyness, I can guarantee you that we'll experience an incredible change. For our lives will belong to Christ and that's something no one can take away from us.

Amen