

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

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July 17, 2022

Luke 10:38-32

As is to be expected with the Bible, our Bible passage for today presents us with the unexpected. Three pieces of this story would have been unexpected at the time of Jesus, and one is unexpected today.

The first unexpected piece of this story occurs when Martha invites Jesus to her home. This would not have happened normally in first century Palestine. If you were a woman in Jesus' day, you did not invite people to your home. You would preside over the hospitality toward the guest. This was important. You would make sure that the food was prepared properly, that it tasted good and arrived on time. You would make sure the house was cleaned, maybe put some flowers out, or a drop of perfume in the oil lamp to give the air a nice smell.

But you would not invite. An invitation to dinner was a sign that your family was aligned with the honored guest, that you supported his agenda, that you included him in your circle of trusted friends. It was a commitment your family was making and the man was the one who made those commitments. The man called the shots, it was the man's household, so he was the one who did the inviting.

And yet, Martha invites Jesus. Either there is no man in the household, or this household is different from most first century households. This family is following Jesus. They share power together.

Unexpected.

The second unexpected event occurs when Mary has the unmitigated gall, the world class audacity to sit at the feet of Jesus. This was unexpected, and outrageous, not only because Mary was not helping Martha cook and clean and prepare the house, but also because Mary was taking the position, the role of a student.

In Jesus' day, a student sat at the feet of the teacher. This was the way you gained a formal education. It would be like, nowadays, you take a class. Except in those days, a formal education was expensive and time consuming. No one would waste all that time and money to educate a mere woman.

So women were not students.

But Mary assumes the role of a student. Which means that, sooner or later, Mary is going to become a teacher. She will have authority in matters of life and wisdom. This is an outrageous position for her to claim.

Third unexpected event: You would think, then, that Martha, being a demure and gracious hostess, would smile and carry on without saying anything. She might apologize for how long it was taking to prepare the food, after all, she did not have as much help as she would have liked. (Insert, here, evil, passive aggressive glance at Mary). Martha would have been gracious and patient until the honored guest, Jesus, had left. And then she would have given her sister Mary such a piece of her mind that she would have burned her ears off.

Does Martha do this? Does she smile and pretend nothing is wrong? No, she does not. This is unexpected. Martha speaks up, right then, when the problem is occurring. She speaks up to Jesus. "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me."

Unexpected in Jesus' day.

Jesus's response, however brings us to something unexpected nowadays. Jesus speaks a challenge and a blessing, and today, we will mention the blessing first.

Jesus says that Mary has chosen the better, or more important part, which will not be taken away from her. Mary sits in the position of a student. And that has not been taken away. Women have been learning about Jesus and teaching about Jesus ever since. But boy oh boy, a lot of people have tried to take it away from her.

For a thousand years, and then another three quarters of a thousand years, and another two centuries after that, people, mostly men, have kept women out of the pulpit, out of positions of authority in the church.

Now, for a little over fifty years, women have been able to take their position as students clearly, openly. Women have become pastors, teachers, theologians, Biblical scholars, seminary professors, bishops and a presiding bishop of our denomination. Powerful, work from so many women.

And I will say this about the men who are pastors. It is over our dead bodies that the role of pastor would ever be taken away from women again.

That's the blessing Jesus gives.

The challenge Jesus gives can be painful for some of us. Because some of us are doers. We identify with Martha, who gets things done, we are busy when everybody else is just kind of lolling around.

Jesus says to Martha, "Martha, Martha, you are pulled apart by many things, there is need of only one thing."

This passage has been interpreted to mean that Jesus is criticizing Martha, maybe even rebuking her. But I would suggest that Jesus is not rebuking, in part, because he repeats her name. In ancient Greek, if you repeated somebody's name, you were not criticizing them. You were not rebuking them, you were expressing sympathy. Jesus cares about Martha.

Jesus cares about us, when we are pulled apart by all the things with which we are so busy. Our culture expects us to be busy. It is presumed in our society that we will run from one thing to another, and boy do we ever meet those expectations.

But Jesus calls us to the unexpected. He says to us, you are so pulled apart in many directions. Why don't you come sit down with Mary for a bit? Because without rest, without peace, our work becomes dust.

Last week, in the verses immediately before the gospel lesson for today, we heard the story of the Good Samaritan, how we must be active in caring for others.

This week, we hear about Mary and Martha. This story balances the other out. In addition to being active, sometimes we just need to sit at the feet of Jesus.

So I'm going to suggest that you take five minutes a day this week, just to be quiet. I'm going to give you a cross you can hold in your hand, to remind you that Jesus is there. If your mind runs on and on about all the things you need to do, that's okay. If you fall asleep, that's okay. Just take a moment.

In fact, we are going to take a minute now. Hold the cross in your hand, and just be with Jesus for a minute. And when we are done, I will finish with a prayer. Thanks be to God.