

Choose the Good Portion

Vicar Albrecht—Abiding Grace Lutheran Church—Luke 10.38-42

For the last month I've noticed a shift. Before July, the questions people would ask me were always related to the here and now. VBS. Outreach. The Building. How I feel about living in Georgia. But recently it's been more about going back to school, moving to Wisconsin. For a while I dodged the questions—things have just been too busy to think about all that.

Think about all that we have had go on this year. BFC, TCW teams, MLHS NHS, WLC Soccer Camp, the girls from Wisconsin, the teens from Immanuel, two vicar farewell sermons...and a little building project. Work days, from rough carpentry to insulation to paint, and now staining. Things have been busy.

And that doesn't even take into account your 'secular' life. Shuttling the kids back and forth to sports, school, and camps. Keeping up with the grandkids. Working hard at your job. Even retired folks feel the schedule crunch. Martha makes sense to us. She too had a lot going on—Jesus showed up with his disciples, either 12 or 70+, and she needed to get a meal ready. Talk about a lot going on. And the LORD knew it. He knew that Martha had the best of intentions, but that her busyness had distracted her from what was really important. So let's get away from the busyness of life and hear the WORD.

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

The complaint of *Lord, don't you care...tell _____ to help me!* might sound all too familiar to many of us. When I ran through the brief overview of all the groups that came—how did you feel? Honestly. Maybe a small part of you wished that just one less group had come. Or maybe you felt that way at the time.

We've had a lot going on—and there was always a phone call or an email from someone asking you to do something—house someone, feed this group, canvass with that group. Or maybe you just said no each time, because you didn't want to fall into the rotation of people to ask.

There is a little bit of Martha in each one of us, isn't there? Frustrated because there is so much to do, and so little time and helpers to see it through.

But what is the point in all of this running around? Getting things prepared. We'll admit some of our busyness is for selfish reasons. But in our Gospel text Martha wasn't making a meal for herself, she was getting her house ready for the LORD's arrival and she wanted some help.

Isn't that exactly what we are doing right now at Abiding Grace? Getting our house ready for the LORD. Sometimes, we feel just like Martha, pulled in a million different directions. Overworked,

overstressed, overwhelmed by the LORD's work. Doesn't he care about all the work we are doing for him? Why doesn't he help us get his work done?

Maybe you have spent long hours at the new building. Ruined many t-shirts, sweat through countless pairs of socks. But your service isn't as joyful as it once was. Maybe you feel like more people should have been there to help.

Martha felt the same way. Mary, her sister, witnessed the Pharisee, Simon's lack of hospitality. Martha didn't want to be called out likewise. She was running around making sure everything was ready, perfect for the LORD to come.

Isn't that our plan of ministry in a nutshell? Getting our house ready for the LORD to come—again. We want to make sure that we have reached out to our community, to the lost and the wandering, preached to the obstinate and delinquent, ministered to the sad & the hurting so when the LORD comes to see our house he is pleased. So we work, & work, until it becomes just that—work.

It's easy to get so focused on the task at hand that we forget from whose hand it came. We can get wrapped up in the painting, the staining, the landscaping coming around the corner that it all becomes toil. Sports, school, recitals all become joyless work. Getting the kids ready one more day—Sunday morning—is a frustrating fight. Sometimes, we'd rather just throw in the towel.

And we can make plenty of excuses—even find quotes from Scripture that talk about the responsibility we have as parents, the blessing that a new building will serve our congregation—all of these are true.

In and of themselves they are not wrong or sinful—but Satan would love us to think that these—by themselves—are service to God. He wants us convinced that we need to get things prepared for our Savior by ourselves, because the work isn't done.

While we make preparations for everyone else to come to the meal at the Table we must remember that we too are guests. Christ is the Host, a valuable reminder for each one of us. He is the one who is in charge of the 'menu' and he is the one who made all the preparations so we all can eat, each one of us. He invites us just to sit at his feet. Be filled. Be refreshed. Relax in the grace he has prepared and given.

And the LORD knows our hearts, too. We want nothing more than what he wants—his will to be done, his kingdom to be advanced. This is why he doesn't rebuke us sternly as he did for Simon the Pharisee. Instead he comes to us gently, as he did Martha. Repeating her name twice. Fully aware of the anxious thoughts, the worry in our hearts. It is not that he doesn't appreciate the work she was doing. He knew it was valuable. But he also knew that he needed to remind her of the better portion—the one Mary had chosen.

Mary had already been refreshed at the feet of the LORD. She had relaxed in grace as she washed his feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, adorned them with kisses, anointed them with expensive perfume. She had already seen how even servant work isn't spirit crushing when done for the LORD. As the Holy Spirit worked faith in her heart—called her to repentance from her life of sin—she had been refreshed and completely renewed. Faith worked in her heart taught her the best place to be, to show honor, and reverence was to place herself humbly at the feet of her LORD.

Jesus wanted Martha to know this rest too. Though she was concerned with getting a proper meal on the table something worthy of the Teacher, she had missed the fact that the better meal was already prepared, already ready. Christ had done it all—everything that was necessary was done.

And this is the same promise he offers to you and me. Yes, there is a lot of things we feel like we need to do—in our church, our homes, in our lives. But he promises that all the important work is done. He promises that his Word will accomplish his exact purposes. He promises that he cares for each of his children and knows them by name. He promises that he alone can give us true rest from everything that has us overworked, overstressed, or overwhelmed.

The same gentle rebuke he gave to Martha, he gives to you and me. Christ reminds us that the work he has placed before is important—but that we too must remain rooted in the one thing needful. In the WORD of God. Here we are purified from our spiteful and hateful thoughts towards our brothers and sisters, towards the work he has given us the opportunity to do. Here, he proclaims forgiveness for the sins of busyness, worry, anxiousness, and frustration in our lives. Here we are washed clean of our anger, our feelings of self-reliance. Here we are reminded that the work of salvation is done, completely. This is why we gather together to be refreshed anew.

We may grow tired and frustrated thinking we have too much going on. Some days our responsibilities can feel overwhelming. We wonder if we can get it all done. At times we want to cry out as Martha did, **Lord, don't you care?** And he does. He cared enough to live perfectly, to die innocently, to rise victoriously, to invite us to his feet gently.

Together, sitting at the feet of our LORD we are washed clean. Here we are reminded that we just a part of the body—a beloved part yes, but simply a part. And Christ is our head. He is in control. He sees to it that the work is done. His love cannot be taken away from us—his forgiveness is the good portion that he allows us the opportunity to proclaim to many. Rejoice in the one thing needful...because it's the one thing we can be sure is already done. AMEN.