

In Nomine Iesu

The Fifteenth Sunday after Christmas Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest – Luke 10:38-42

“Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me.’ But the Lord answered her ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives in the hearts of His people. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

As most of you know, I returned home to Parkland after spending two weeks in the Czech Republic, specifically in the city of Plzen. It is truly good to be home, to see all of you. As I began to study and meditate on the text that is before us this morning, I found myself going back to the years that I taught the Synoptic Gospels, that is, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke to the future Lutheran pastors of our church in Ukraine, which I did from 1995 until 2006. One of my goals in teaching the synoptics was for these future pastors to see how well, how flawlessly, these three gospels fit together and confirm each other, and yet also to bring out the truth that each of them is distinct from the others. Each of the evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell the events of Jesus’ life and ministry, preaching and teaching, accurately and truthfully, but each in their own unique way.

Today, for example, we see back-to-back two accounts that only Luke preserves, and of which Matthew and Mark say nothing. Both of them have great significance and would be picked up and built on by the fourth evangelist, John. The two stories are very familiar to you, one in the regular historic preaching cycle of the church, heard every year: The Good Samaritan, the other in the text before this morning, the story of Mary and Martha, who invited Jesus into their home for dinner. So, let us turn to our text, considering their invitation: “Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest.”

I

The story of the Good Samaritan ended with the lawyer correctly answering the question, “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” To this Jesus answered, “You go, and do likewise.” Then Luke immediately continues: “Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.” (Luke 10:38)

Picture in your mind then, as Jesus and His disciples left the lawyer who, at first, desired “to justify himself,” but forced to look at himself in the light of him who fell among robbers, saw who every dying sinner needed, the true Good Samaritan and neighbor, Jesus Christ, who came our way to seek and to save the lost. Having heard that, they came to a village. There a woman, Martha, met them, inviting Jesus: “Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest.” And He accepted the invitation. Were the twelve included? Luke does not tell us directly. But the fact that he says Martha

“was distracted with **much serving**,” is a telling clue he leaves for us that seems to answer the question. Serving twelve hungry men would require **much serving**. Meanwhile Mary, Martha’s sister, sat at Jesus’ feet, listening to His teaching.

It is not hard for us to understand Martha’s feelings. Because this happens a lot, in the home, at work, in many organizations, even at church. One or two, or a few, do most of the work while others simply stand or sit and enjoy each other’s company. It can be hard to bear at times for those doing the work, as it was for Martha that day, when in her generosity and kindness, she invited into her home the One many in Israel were calling the Promised One, the Messiah. In her frustration, stress, and tiredness, the sight of her sister just sitting and listening, doing nothing to help her, caused her to go to Jesus, and say, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me?”

Dear friends, like many of Luke’s or Matthew’s or Mark’s stories about Jesus, we should not read more into the text than is there. We should not, for example in last Sunday’s gospel, the story of the ten lepers, sit in judgment of the nine who did not return, but of whom nothing more is said. Jesus had commanded them to “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And they did. They did, because they could, and should. They, after all, were Jews. They were following not only Jesus’s command, but the directive also of Moses. Meanwhile, the formerly leprous Samaritan had no such access to priest and temple. He was a Samaritan, a follower of a religion that was filled error. But, in a strange way, this allowed Him to see all the more clearly who Jesus really was, that He was his temple and his priest. The focus in that story is on the Samaritan and **the faith that saved him**, and all who believe like he believed. It is not about the other nine of whom we can only speculate.

II

Since the two stories, that of the Good Samaritan and Martha & Mary, are directly and clearly tied together by Luke, there is likely to be more to Luke’s tying them together than meets the eye. In the Good Samaritan story, we look at the story and may find ourselves thinking, “Well, let us all be Good Samaritans to others, just like the Samaritan in the story.” And then walk away from it with the idea that Jesus was telling the lawyer **and us** to be better neighbors as the way to “justify ourselves.” In effect, that He was telling the lawyer to be better at identifying all his neighbors, even the undesirable ones, and serving them in order to strengthen his connection to God. But that teaching is **foreign** to the Holy Scriptures. It is in effect transforming the Gospel, the good news of God’s gift of salvation in Christ, into a more appealing law. And it is a dangerous form of confusing Law and Gospel, and thus leaving sinners with false hope.

Consider the story of Martha and Mary similarly. Who is the focus of the story? I will give you a clue. It is not Martha. And in fact, Jesus does not criticize Martha. He tells her the simple truth, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things.” And she was ... just like we all are! We too can become so busy with the cares of life that we become as distracted as she. Consider carefully, does Jesus criticize in any way Martha’s work ethic, her service to the twelve, His own chosen disciples and future apostles? How could He? She was doing what is surely a good work, and praiseworthy. Without such good works, where would the holy, Christian Church be? Where would this or any congregation be?

Now look carefully at what Jesus says: “One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” (v. 42) Mary chose to sit doing nothing but listening to Jesus, the Promised One, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and the Savior of each. He is the Good Samaritan and neighbor that we all need to pick us up, bring us to faith, and continue to care for us. What is Mary doing other than precisely what Jesus told the lawyer who wanted to justify himself to do: “Go, and do likewise.” Go, be the man assaulted by robbers, recognize that you are lying half-dead by the side of the road. Look, see the Good Samaritan who has come to you to save you. Mary is doing the very thing Jesus urged the lawyer to do in the previous story. In fact, let’s be even more clear. She is doing nothing but listening! That is what annoyed Martha. She is just listening. She is doing what the poor, half-dead man was doing, nothing. And Jesus attended to her just as the Good Samaritan attended to that man.

Dear friends in Christ, faith is not – let me repeat strongly - **not** something **we do**. It is something **God does within us**. What does the Catechism say about this? Do you remember? “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith ...” Mary sat there, captivated by Jesus’ teaching of forgiveness, mercy, and grace, captivated by the blessed Gospel you know and believe. And, as Jesus assured Martha and us, that which Mary was receiving, forgiveness, life, and mercy, would not be taken from her.

Martha and her sister Mary were without doubt believers in the promised Messiah, before that day they invited Jesus into their home. They had come to faith the same way you and I did, by hearing the Gospel, the word of God, and being persuaded in that hearing by God the Holy Spirit. They’d looked for the promised Messiah, waited for Him, now He was here. Is not that why you sit here today, dear Marthas and Marys and Lazaruses? Your faith brought you here to do nothing, just as Mary did, nothing but listen. Your Lord says you that what you hear: your sins are forgiven you and your home is heaven, will not be taken from you. That is your Lord’s promise.

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The evangelist John would later take up the rest of the story of Martha, Mary, Lazarus their brother, and Jesus their Lord to show us how true these things are. And so, I commend to your reading John chapter 11. There you will see the faith of Martha and Mary, and the resurrection from the dead of their brother Lazarus.

God Himself brings you to faith in His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Thus here you sit, because you have come to hear Him in whom you believe. You have taken your seat in this place where your Lord has promised to be with you. And having heard, “in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” you said in your hearts, “Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest.” And so, He does indeed come to you, in word and sacrament. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria