

Luke 10:38-42

Summer is vacation time
Bobby is on vacation in Europe currently
And Pastor Maria is also on vacation this week
I know of several Hope members who have enjoyed vacations recently
--travelling to different parts of the country and the world

One of my, and my wife Candy's, favorite places to vacation is Mackinac Island
The island is located in the Straits of Mackinac
--where Lake Michigan and Lake Huron come together
The island does not allow any motorized vehicles
If you want to get around
--you have to walk or bike or take a horse-drawn carriage
It harks back to a simpler, slower-paced style of life
I enjoy sitting in a rocking chair overlooking Lake Huron reading a good book and
hearing the waves lap up on the shore
It's the perfect place to relax and destress

Sometimes when we go on vacation, however, we are much more active
You know the type
--trying to cram in every activity we possibly can
--riding every ride at Disneyland
--seeing all the sights
--keeping active from morning to night

Those types of vacations are totally different from each other
--and we enjoy them both
It's not that one is better than the other
It's just that some times we prefer one, and sometimes the other

I think of these two opposite types of vacation on this summer Sunday morning as we
read together the story of Mary and Martha
Two sisters who were the polar opposites of each other
Martha was a blur of activity
--keeping the household running
--as she entertained a full house of guests
Mary, on the other hand, just sat quietly
--waiting to hear what Jesus had to say
Martha was giving orders
Mary was listening
Martha was busy
Mary was still

Sometimes, I'm afraid, we make a competition between Mary and Martha
 We try to decide which one was living the right way
 But I don't think we should be trying to choose between the two sisters in our Gospel
 today

I don't think it is very helpful for us to decide which one is right and which one is wrong
 In fact, the more I study this Gospel the more I have come to realize that both Mary and
 Martha are right
 --they are both good followers of Jesus
 --they are both doing good things

Martha is the one who invited Jesus to come to her house after all
 And it's interesting to me that the Bible calls it "Martha's house"
 In those patriarchal days, it was unusual for a house to be run by a woman
 Martha clearly was a person who had administrative and organizational skills
 She could run a house

Martha was the one who welcomed Jesus
 Naturally she wanted everything to be perfect when Jesus was staying at her house
 And with Jesus, of course, came his twelve disciples
 She needed to provide board and room for all of them
 It was no easy task
 An ordinary person couldn't have done it
 But Martha – she was up to the task
 And it took all of her
 --organizational skills
 --energy
 --to do it

We read that Martha was distracted by her many tasks
 The Greek word for *distractions* used here means literally
 --she was pulled from all directions
 I can relate to that, can't you?
 We all know what that is like
 --to be pulled in different directions
 --many people wanting our time
 --many tasks demanding to be done

But being distracted by her many tasks is not something to criticize Martha for
 It just means that she was a busy, responsible person
 It was because she was so competent that she had been entrusted with a lot of things
 to do
 And it was because she was so responsible that she tried to get them all done
 Martha was very skilled in showing hospitality
 Hospitality has always been very important to believers in God
 It was a sacred duty in the OT

So we hear the story this morning of Abraham offering hospitality to strangers, travelling in the desert
 --giving them something to eat, and to drink
 --giving them a place to rest

What an important characteristic that is of a Christian
 Being concerned about the needs of others
 And acting in ways to help meet those needs
 One of the things I love about this congregation is its commitment to showing hospitality to others
 As a congregation, we care about
 --people who have housing needs
 --people who have food needs
 --people who have health needs
 And we show that care by actively doing things to meet those needs
 Yes, we remember the needs of others in our prayers
 But we also work to meet those needs
 We collect clothing items
 We gather in food donations
 We make up bags of needed items to give to unsheltered persons
 We reach out to unsheltered persons and meet them where they are
 And we do it all in the name of Jesus
 The One who said:
When you do it for the least ones, you do it to me.

Martha knew how to serve others
 And she served in Jesus' name

Mary was quite different
 In fact, Mary did not seem to have any trouble just sitting and listening to Jesus
 She seems to be unfazed by the hospitality work that needed to be done
 As a matter of fact, Martha actually complained to Jesus that Mary was leaving her to do all the work
 "I could use a little help here, Jesus," Martha seems to be saying
 "Mary has left me to do all the work."

Mary was intent on taking time to simply sit at Jesus' feet and listen to him
 That was not a sign of weakness, on Mary's part
 In fact, Mary was just as assertive as Martha was
 Mary was actually being quite bold
 Women were not allowed to be students with men
 Educating women was not allowed
 For Mary to sit and listen to Jesus as he taught his disciples was a revolutionary thing to do
 So Mary was really pushing the envelope when she sat down with the men to listen to Jesus teach

And Jesus commended her for it
I believe that Jesus was validating Mary's breaking conventional rules
Many people in her day would have criticized Mary for breaking the rules by learning
with men
Jesus would not criticize her for that
--he complimented her for doing it

So both Martha and Mary were faithful believers in Jesus
They were followers of Jesus, just like the 12 disciples

But that is not to say that Martha and Mary were without their flaws
In fact I believe it is fair to say that both of them needed better balance in their lives.

Martha was just too busy
She knew it
--but she couldn't help herself
She could not force herself to take time to slow down and enjoy life – and listen to Jesus
She was too driven by all the things – the good things – that she was doing
Martha needed some balance in her life

Because her busyness was not just causing her to become too distracted
It was not just possibly leading her to having a heart attack
Worst of all, it was hurting her relationship with Jesus

It takes time to have a relationship with Jesus
Martha never seemed to have that time
So if we are going to criticize Martha for anything today
--let it be this
Martha needed to spend more time with Jesus
--being with Jesus
--listening to Jesus
--allowing Jesus to teach her
--and direct all of the good things she
was doing

Martha was busy doing many good things
Jesus reminded her of the one thing that is the best
--having a relationship with Jesus

Mary also needed some balance in her life
Mary seemed to struggle with the challenge of putting the ideas that she heard from
Jesus into action
It is not good enough to learn the principles that Jesus teaches
--they need to be translated into action
Jesus taught that we should love other people
How do you do that?
With your actions – showing love

By meeting the needs of our neighbors

Who is our neighbor?

That's the question that the man asked in last Sunday's Gospel

And Jesus told him the story of the Good Samaritan to teach that anyone in need is our neighbor

We are neighbors by doing things for others

--when we act neighborly

The challenge for Mary was to be able to find ways to serve Jesus with her actions

--actions that matched her beliefs

We don't need to take sides in the Martha or Mary debate

Because both of them had their strengths and weaknesses

And we can learn from both of them

From Martha, we can learn how to serve our Lord

From Mary, we can learn the importance of taking time to be with Jesus

From both Martha and Mary we can learn the importance of balance in our lives

Are you an active person?

Organized and energetic?

Wanting to serve God in any way you can?

That's great – You are a dedicated Christian

But don't forget to make time to be alone with Jesus

Don't be so concerned about the needs of others that you forget about your need for prayer, Bible study, meditation, worship

Are you more of a contemplative person?

Do you enjoy silent meditation, sacred reading, prayer?

Are you working on establishing a close relationship with God?

That's great – you are a dedicated Christian

But don't forget to put your faith into action

Don't be so concerned about your own relationship with Jesus that you ignore the needs of others

Strive to keep your life in balance

But remember

--there is one important thing

In last Sunday's Gospel we heard a man ask Jesus what was the one necessary thing he had to do to have eternal life

The man quoted scriptures and said:

Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.

And Jesus said – **That's right**

Love God – with all you've got

Love your neighbor

That's what is really important

Here it is repeated again
(Maybe so we will get the point)

Be like Mary

- take time to be alone with God
- take time for sacred reading and prayer
- take time to listen to God

And also

Be like Martha

- show your love for God by loving your neighbor
- demonstrate love by your actions
- live your faith in your life

We are all following Jesus the best that we can
He is central in our lives
And that is the one most important thing