

“To Glorify God and Enjoy God Forever”

Luke 10: 38-42

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Last week in our Dining with Jesus summer sermon series, we looked at the Feeding of the 5000 story and walked out the sanctuary doors with Jesus' words echoing in our ears: “YOU give them something to eat.” It was a mandate to do more than believe; Jesus told us to act on our faith.

This week we join Mary and Martha as they welcome Jesus and his followers to their home. And today the message isn't “go and do.” Instead, we hear “STOP doing... and listen.”

A close read of the gospels reveals Jesus is seldom predictable. When people ask him questions, his answers are often puzzling. A man asks, “Who is my neighbor?” and Jesus replies, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell among robbers....” In today's story Jesus responds again in an unpredictable way.

Picture the scene inside this tiny home: Martha, *obviously* the older sister, is busy. Though scripture doesn't say it, we assume she is preparing a meal for this band of weary travelers. Mary, on the other hand, *clearly* the younger sister, lounges, unbothered, at the feet of Jesus.

This story is located in Luke soon after Jesus sends 70 of his followers out to preach and heal in his name.ⁱ They travel with no resources and their survival depends solely on the hospitality of others. In fact, hospitality is so essential Jesus says: *If you're not welcomed into people's homes, shake the town's dust from your sandals and be on your way.*

Shortly after the 70 joyously return from their fruitful mission trips, an attorney asks Jesus that famous question, “Who is my neighbor?” The parable of The Good Samaritan tells us the neighbor is the person who shows mercy, ensures

the victim's safety, and pays for his recovery. Hospitality is also front and center in this parable.

Now this rabbi Jesus and many of his followers appear at the door of Martha and Mary. And these two sisters are faithful. Martha immediately recognizes the need for hospitality. Because Martha knows Jesus' teachings, that he says to serve others, to feed the hungry, to be kind and thoughtful and to share the burden, she asks Jesus for an assist with her lounging little sister Mary. "I'm overwhelmed with all that I have to do by myself," Martha says to Jesus. "Surely you care that I am stressed. Will you tell my little sister to get on her feet and help me!"

And Jesus' reply is unpredictable. You might expect him to turn toward Mary, resting at his feet, and say, "Hospitality is holy! My goodness, don't you care about your sister Martha? Help her! YOU give us something to eat!"

But he doesn't say that, does he? Instead, he tells Martha, who has been hustling to get dinner on the table, to relax and pay attention to the only thing that truly matters: the Word. The Word as in Jesus himself, and the word as in everything Jesus says.

Could it be that Martha has impossibly high standards of hospitality? And meeting those standards is her sole point of focus?

My husband Billy and I were once house guests of a wealthy New York family. We were a young couple in our 20s. We're casual people at home and we often have dinner in our exercise clothing or blue jeans. In this home, however, they dressed for dinner: no sneakers or denim at the table. Our hosts had very high standards and expectations. In fact, every day of our stay the staff stripped our bed, washed our sheets, **IRONED OUR SHEETS**, and then remade the bed.

There is basic hospitality: food to fill your belly and a place to safely rest. And then there is "hospitality!" where there are name cards at dinner and freshly ironed sheets in the guest house.

Is anyone here the oldest sibling in your family, a “Martha?” I suspect some of you first-borns recognize this younger sibling behavior of Mary’s, yes? The one who doesn’t have family member birthdays written down anywhere? The younger sibling who followed their heart rather than the plan? The younger sibling who doesn’t call your aging parents as often as you think they should?

We firstborns, and I have to guess Martha is one of us, we often have exacting standards. We might be “large and in charge.” In fact, we might have set OUR standards as the household standards, and when those standards are not met, we shake our head and sometimes sigh loudly. We have in our minds what is necessary to make things *just right*. And honestly, that can become our primary focus. Our ONLY focus.

But here’s the tricky part. It turns out that sometimes those high standards aren’t *necessary* standards. We’re demanding so much of ourselves and others . . . so much that sometimes we miss the good parts, the essential parts, of life.

Have you ever found when you host a party, you are so busy filling glasses and replenishing food you miss enjoying any meaningful conversation before the night ends. Somehow, even though you hosted, you seem to have missed the whole thing.

Mary knows better in this story, doesn’t she? How many opportunities will she get to sit at the feet of Jesus the Christ? To listen to every word he utters, watch his facial expressions, study his body language? This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance and she knows to take it.

Hospitality expert Rohan Adam-Holslag says the trend for dinner parties these days is to be “less performative, more present.”ⁱⁱ What matters is not what’s on the table, but what is on your heart. And this is what Jesus says to Martha.

In the year 30, at Jesus’ socioeconomic level, feeding a guest kept them alive. Dinner was essential.

In 2026, when we invite someone to dinner, sure, we feed them. But really we are inviting them for conversation. For community. We are setting the table for

relationship building. The Interfaith meals we share with our Dunwoody Muslim and Jewish siblings? We all know it isn't about the food. It's about our shared faith in a God who created us to be in relationship with each other.

That's what Jesus was telling Martha. *In God's kingdom, we don't need the food to truly live. We need the Word.*

Luke 10 tells us Jesus' words, but we don't know his tone or intention. Many people read his remarks to Martha as a rebuke.ⁱⁱⁱ "Martha, Martha!" he says.

Can you imagine his tone as the opposite of a rebuke? Could his words be invitational? Did Jesus pause, gently tilt his head to the side with a bemused look on his face, and smilingly say, "Martha, Martha, [sigh] you are worried and distracted by many things but [smiling] few things are needed—indeed only one." Gesturing her over, he continues, "Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

One of the many gems in our Presbyterian Book of Confessions is Question One of the Westminster Catechism. Updating the 1660 language for a modern reading, the question asks: "What is the main purpose of human beings?" And the answer is simple, "To glorify God and to enjoy God forever."

Surely that was what Mary was up to. And since Luke's chapter ends with the Jesus' invitation for Martha to join him, we are free to imagine that Martha took him up on his offer. She stopped worrying about her imperfectly swept dirt floor, she tossed aside her dishcloth along with her pretense and her penchant for perfection, and she collapsed into a tired but happy heap next to little sister Mary. At the feet of the Master. Martha looked into Jesus' eyes, listened to his voice, and when she was calm, when her anxiety had melted away, when she knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, she was beloved, then she called the disciples to dinner. And perhaps Jesus himself gave thanks, broke his bread, and shared it with her. And she was able to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

Amen.

Benediction:

For years, my next-door neighbor made me tired just watching her. She planted bushes. She soldered jewelry. She bedazzled her garage floor. She refinished furniture on top of her newly bedazzled garage floor. She never, ever stopped. Her dad fondly called her, “Our Lady of Perpetual Motion.” And yes, she was the first born, the older sister.

If you’re a person in perpetual motion, if making a to-do list and then crossing things off brings you joy, here’s an idea. Add one more item to the top of your list. Set your alarm 10 minutes earlier every day in July. And spend those minutes in what Jesus says is the only thing we need: the Word. Open your Bible to the middle, to Psalms, and read one out loud. Work your way through the gospel of Luke one chapter or one parable at a time. Or simply close your eyes while you are still lying in bed and silently talk to God and listen for God’s reply. Before the distractions worm their way between you and the Word, spend a few minutes reclining at the feet of the Savior.

ⁱ The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol IX, Luke John, Leander E. Kick, et.al. eds, Nashville, Abingdon Press, p. 231.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.livingetc.com/ideas/table-setting-trends-for-2025>, accessed June 22, 2026.

ⁱⁱⁱ The New Interpreter’s Bible, 232.