



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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July 18, 2010

MARY AND MARTHA
Luke 10:38-42

The title of my sermon today is "Mary and Martha" but I could have easily called it "Night and Day" because Mary and Martha were as different as night and day. Let's take a look at these two women ... who, very likely, were among Jesus' closest friends ... and see what they have to teach us about our lives.



According to scripture, Mary and Martha lived with their brother, Lazarus, in the village of Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem, near the Mount of Olives. I'm sure you remember it was Lazarus that Jesus raised from the dead. In telling the story of the raising of Lazarus, John says that Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." (John 11:3) Obviously, Jesus had a special place in his heart for Lazarus. John goes on to say, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." (John 11:5)

If you check out the gospels, you'll find that Jesus and his disciples often stayed in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus when they came to Jerusalem. I guess their place was a kind of spiritual hangout for Jesus ... a place where he could kick back, relax and just be himself among friends.

Undoubtedly, Mary and Martha played a special role in the life of Jesus. What's interesting about them is that they were so different from each other; yet, from every indication, Jesus loved them both the same.

And this is the main point of my sermon today: that God's love is more inclusive than we can ever imagine; that no matter how strange and different and out of synch you think you are – or you think your neighbor is – there's a place in God's family for YOU. As Jesus told his disciples, "The Kingdom of God is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind." (Matthew 13:47) Or, as Charles Wesley wrote:

"Thy sovereign grace to all extends, immense and unconfined,
From age to age it never ends, it reaches all mankind."

(The Book of Hymns, UMC, p. 130)

As you listen to the way Mary and Martha are described in the Bible, I'd like for you to think about all the Mary's and Martha's you've known over the years, and all those who, maybe like you, fall somewhere in between, and then rejoice in the fact that EACH is precious in the sight of God.



So, what do we know about Mary and Martha?

They first appear in this passage from Luke's gospel we just read. It begins, "Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home." As I said, Jesus and his disciples often stayed in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus when they came to Jerusalem. However, Luke is pretty clear here in saying that, "Martha welcomed him into HER home."

What does that tell you about Martha?

I think it means, first of all, that MARTHA was the oldest of the three. I also think it means that she was the one who was in charge. Did you know that the name, Martha, actually means, "Lady of

the House"? As for MARY, Luke simply tells us that Martha, "...had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying."

The picture we get of these two women is clear from the very beginning: we have an OLDER SISTER who was quick to assume responsibility and do whatever needed to be done, and a YOUNGER SISTER who was comfortable yielding to authority and letting others carry the load.

MARTHA was very matter-of-fact and concerned about the details.

MARY was idealistic and had her head in the clouds.

MARTHA was a doer. She liked to stay busy. She expressed herself by doing things for others.

MARY, on the other hand, was content simply to be. She was thoughtful and contemplative. She expressed herself by her willingness to sit and listen and give another person her full and undivided attention.

Well, as you might imagine, this proved to be a source of contention between the two women according to Luke. He wrote:

"But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me!'"



Have you ever taken a Myers-Briggs test? It's an instrument counselors use to get a handle on identifying personality traits. For example, some of us are extroverted ... we draw our strength from outside of ourselves. At the same time, some of us are introverted ... we draw our strength from within.

Here's a little test: When there's a crisis, do you pick up the phone and call your friends and family, or do you go off somewhere to be by yourself? When things go awry, an extrovert tends to get into high gear; an introvert tends to hunker down.

The story is told of two guys talking about conflict in marriage. One said to the other, "When my wife and I have a fight, she always comes crawling to me on her knees." His buddy gave him a skeptical look. "No, it's true," he said. "Whenever we have a big argument, I'll go hide under the bed, and she'll get down on her knees and say, 'Come out from under there and fight like a man!'" That guy's a "hunker downer!"

Another personality trait is this: Some of us rely on sensations ... such as the things we see around us, facts and figures. While others are more intuitive ... relying on their gut reaction, they tend to be innovative and feel comfortable writing their own script. They're the type who would say, "Don't confuse me with the facts; my mind's made up."

Some of you are predominantly thinking types ... systematic and analytical. While some of us are predominantly feeling types ... empathetic and emotional. And, lastly, some of you prefer to get things resolved and brought to a close, inflexible; while some of us prefer to keep things open-ended, fluid and subject to change.

THE POINT IS: God created us individually and uniquely and gave us a variety of ways to live out our lives. The challenge is to celebrate our differences and recognize the fact that we don't all think and act alike.

Mary and Martha were as different as night and day, yet, they loved Jesus with all their heart, and he loved them equally.



We definitely see this played out in the story of the raising of Lazarus. According to John, Lazarus became seriously ill, and so, Mary and Martha sent for Jesus. He'd healed others; maybe he could save their brother. Jesus and his disciples were camping on the Jordan River, north of Jericho, near the spot where he'd been baptized. So, Mary and Martha sent word for him to come

at once. But it was a two-day journey to Bethany ... and they didn't leave until the next day. By the time they got there, Lazarus was dead. John says, "As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met Him, but Mary stayed in the house." (John 11:20)

Again, we see the differences in their personalities. Martha was impulsive and quick to act. Mary was pensive and content to wait her turn. As John tells the story, "Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you'd only been here, my brother would not have died...'" (11:21)

Can't you just hear the anger in Martha's tone of voice? "If you'd only been here..." as if to say, "What took you so long? It's all YOUR fault!" If the tables had been turned, and it had been Jesus who'd sent for Martha, you'd better believe she would've gotten there quicker. She would've left right away. She wouldn't have stopped to rest. And when she got there, she'd take charge, do something, make it right. That was Martha!

After Martha spoke to Jesus, she sent for Mary. When Mary got there, she fell at his feet and said essentially the same thing: "Lord, if you'd only been here, my brother would not have died." (11:32) Yet, coming from Mary, we hear a different tone ... not so much anger, as sadness and resignation. What did she do? She began to cry. And when Jesus saw her crying, he was so touched by her grief that he began to cry with her. This is where we get the shortest verse in the Bible: "Jesus wept." (John 11:35) He wept over the death of his friend, Lazarus, but, as importantly, he wept in sympathy with his friend, Mary. When he regained his composure, he ordered the stone sealing the tomb to be rolled back. He prayed to God and called with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." (11:43) And, to the amazement of all, Lazarus came out of the tomb, bandaged from head to toe, and Jesus said, "Unbind him, and let him go." (11:44)

This would be Jesus' last miracle. Do you remember his first miracle? He turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. (John 2:1ff) Who was it that prompted that miracle? His mother, Mary. How fitting, and, maybe even a little ironic, that his last miracle was also prompted by a woman named Mary, and by her tears that so moved Jesus, that he brought her brother back to life.

You see, don't you, Mary had a special gift of quiet love and devotion that brought out the best in others.

What about Martha ... well Martha had the gift of hospitality. In our passage this morning, Luke says, "Martha received him into her house." On another occasion, we're told that "Jesus came to Bethany ... there they gave a dinner for him, (and) Martha served." (John 12:1-2)



Hospitality is one of the oldest and most time-honored of all gifts. Did you know that, in the early days, "hospitals" were actually wayside inns in which weary travelers could find food and lodging and refreshment from their journey? They were called "hospitals" because their primary purpose was to provide hospitality. This whole business of treating wounds arose out of necessity as guests came into the "hospital" bruised and scarred from the difficulties encountered on their travels.

The Hospice Movement inspired by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in Great Britain started off – and continues to this day – as an effort to recapture the spirit of hospitality by giving the terminally ill a comfortable and caring home in which to live out their final days.

Martha had the gift of hospitality. She opened her home to Jesus. She nurtured him with food from her kitchen. She gave him a place to get away from the pressing crowds and to escape the hostility of religious leaders.

Hospitality is a wonderful gift, and, when offered in the name of Jesus Christ, it's every bit as important as the ability to sing or play an instrument or teach a Sunday School class or preach a sermon. Hospitality is an essential element of Christian discipleship ... ESSENTIAL!



You've probably heard this one before.

Three women were killed in an accident on their way to a prayer meeting. They reached the Pearly Gates together and, one by one, they stood before St. Peter. St. Peter asked the first woman, "Were you a Christian on earth?" And she said, "Oh, yes, I was a Roman Catholic – here are my rosary beads." St. Peter looked at her beads, how worn they were, and said, "Oh, my. Welcome to God's heavenly kingdom."

Then he turned to the second woman and asked, "Were you a Christian on earth?" And she said, "Oh, yes, I was a Southern Baptist – here's my Bible." St. Peter looked at her Bible, how worn it was, and said, "Oh, my. Welcome to God's heavenly kingdom."

Then he turned to the third woman and asked, "Were you a Christian on earth?" And she said, "Oh, yes, I was a Presbyterian – see, here's my casserole!"

All kidding aside, I say it every Sunday and I mean it: We are a loving family of God. The meals you share with those who are sick and in grief; the visits you make to our doves, our shut-ins, bringing them little gifts and sharing the flowers; the extra effort you put into welcoming visitors and helping them become part of our family of faith ... all these things are just as pleasing to God and important to the mission of Christ's kingdom on earth as anything anyone could possibly say or do.

Hospitality is a precious commodity.

It plays an essential part in being a follower of Christ.

MARTHA welcomed Jesus into her home. She served him from her kitchen. By contrast, MARY sat at his feet and held on to his every word. According to John's gospel, she was the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with costly perfume and then wiped them with her hair. (John 12:3)

And this is where I'd like to close the sermon today, to recognize that, while Mary and Martha were as different as night and day, Jesus made a place for each of them in his heart.

I like to think that, as different as WE are, God makes a special place for each of us in the kingdom and calls us to share the Good News of God's love and acceptance with EVERYONE.

John Ernest Bode put this in a prayer when he wrote:

"O Jesus, Thou Hast Promised
to all who follow thee,
that where thou art in glory
there shall thy servant be.
And, Jesus, I have promised
to serve thee to the end,
O give me grace to follow,
my master and my friend."

(Presbyterian Hymnal, p. 388)

Amen and Amen.