

Many of us know the story of Martha and Mary. There are two women in the house when Jesus comes over. One spends time listening to Jesus the other spends time in the kitchen.

You may have previously heard that this is an example of the practical versus the spiritual. Through this explanation, Martha, the one in the kitchen is portrayed as being 'distracted' by worldly things, while Mary, the one listening to Christ is paying attention to what matters.

Let's look at these two women. There's Mary, sitting at Jesus' feet, a disciple, focused on the spiritual necessities of life. Martha is distracted by the physical 'necessities' of life—the cooking and cleaning. And she's put out that she's doing it herself although, clearly, she also had the option of sitting with Jesus. Martha in the kitchen is the perfect example of the culture norm. She's going through the motions of hospitality, preparing a meal for her guests, but she's not actually entertaining Jesus.

(Yikes! Do we do this? Go to church on Sunday, offer our pledges for the many ministries, and even donate to charity or volunteer at YCSA, but not spend time with Christ? Do we think we know what we're supposed to do so we avoid learning further? Or is it that we spend time in the kitchen peeling and chopping and sauteeing when we could throw it all in the pot, skin and all, and just make a boiled dinner? Are we spending more time than we need on unimportant things? Are we doing busy work when we could be connecting with Christ?)

The word hospitality has the same root as the word hospital. When you had guests in Biblical times, you would wash your guests' dusty feet, you'd offer them food and shelter. It would go far beyond the offer we typically make today, "Can I get you something to drink?"

When someone is a guest, implicit therein is that they won't always be with you. They are with you only temporarily. When a guest is in front of you, you are to pay attention to them, not the other worldly distractions. If we had company over, we wouldn't be on our phone or tablet playing Candy Crush.

Many of you are familiar with Erma Bombeck. She was a newspaper columnist and author with a terrific sense of humor. When she learned that she had cancer, she wrote a piece called, "If I had my life to live over." I want to read it to you now and I encourage you to consider that what she says can be easily compared to our scripture reading from Luke's gospel.

She said, "If I had my life to live over, I would have talked less and listened more. I would have invited friends over to dinner even if the carpet was stained and the sofa faded. I would have eaten the popcorn in the 'good' living room and worried much less about the dirt when someone wanted to light a fire in the fireplace. I would have taken the time to listen to my grandfather ramble about his youth. I would never have insisted the car windows be rolled up on a summer day because my hair had just been teased and sprayed.

I would have burned the pink candle sculpted like a rose before it melted in storage. I would have sat on the lawn with my children and not worried about grass stains. I would have cried and laughed less while watching television - and more while watching life. I would have shared more of the responsibility carried by my husband. I would have gone to bed when I was sick instead of pretending the earth would go into a holding pattern if I weren't there for the day. I would never have bought anything just because it was practical, wouldn't show soil or was guaranteed to last a lifetime.

Instead of wishing away nine months of pregnancy, I'd have cherished every moment and realized that the wonderment growing inside me was the only chance in life to assist God in a miracle. When my kids kissed me impetuously, I would never have said, "Later. Now go get washed up for dinner." There would have been more "I love you's".. More "I'm sorrrys" ... But mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute... look at it and really see it ... live it...and never give it back.

It was the practice of rabbis in the day to sit on pillows on the floor and the disciples or students would sit on the floor “at his feet”. Two important things about this passage is that 1. Jesus is allowing a woman to sit there and be taught and 2. she's chosen to do so instead of helping her sister clean and prep a meal.

Martha complains about it and asks his intervention, but Jesus, ever the teacher, seizes upon this moment to go further—just like he did in the parable of the Good Samaritan. It's not just about the societal norm. He shares that *his teaching will serve Mary for a lifetime*. He's showing Martha, that there's something even more important than serving a good meal to your guests—and it's been available to her. Mary chose to partake, not just to offer. For us the lesson is the same. Choose to receive. **Be in a reciprocal relationship with Christ. Jesus is what matters, not the distractions of cooking or email or busy work.**

I met with a wedding couple a few weeks ago. We'd gone through all of my typical premarital counseling questions and once more, over the details when I asked, “Do you have any questions for me?” The bride said yes, “What advice do you have for us?” I said, “Don't worry about all of the planning and the details. Just remember why you're getting married.” Weddings today are events of a lifetime. In my day, it was the wedding, reception, and sometimes a brunch for out of towners. Today, it can be days leading up to the ceremony, with trolley tours for sightseeing and elaborate gift bags and rehearsal dinners for everyone who is in town at the time. The last few weeks leading up to the wedding ceremony can be fraught with anxiety over details. All of that is unimportant. God brought them together. That's what's important.

God, and their love, will carry them through. That's what they should focus on. They'll forget the seating arrangements and who gave them which gifts, but they'll remember their love for one another. That relationship is the constant. And it's what matters. It's what will be a driving force in their ongoing relationship through the years and decades. And it will be a compass for how they live together and deal with things that come their way.

Jesus ought to be ours. A relationship with Jesus matters. Remember that relationship. Remember the things you've learned from Jesus. Let that be the foundation for living your life. The cooking and cleaning will always be there, so will the work, the car, and the email. Comparatively, those things are unimportant. Spend time with Christ every day. Spend time with people with whom you have a relationship. Teach and learn from each other. Talk about God. That's what matters. We are together in Christian community to remember or learn what really matters and to have those lessons influence our thoughts, words, and actions. This is just part of the reason why church matters. We teach an ethics based on love and grounded in love. Blessed be and amen.