

WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH



SERMON

May 8, 2022

The Better Way

Rev. Louise Rogers

© 2022 by Rev. Louise Rogers and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

All rights reserved.

No part of this sermon may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: May 12, 2022

Luke 10:38–42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. 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.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

The Better Way

Our cousins Susan and Scott were celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary. Their three children thought a great gift for this anniversary would be to invite the family, their aunts, uncles, and children to their home for a surprise party. Planning commenced! On the anniversary day, on Saturday afternoon at 3:00 the doorbell rang. Scott answered the door to cheers of Surprise! Hearing the uproar, Susan quickly rushed downstairs as her siblings and their families burst into their home. Such fun and excitement as seventeen guests streamed into their Florida home. The family has a great time catching up and greeting each other. Soon Susan heard someone say, what are we doing for dinner? While the surprise was a thrill, it turned

out that this was the only part of the weekend that had been planned. Actually, Susan and Scott had to pull together something for dinner for their guests. As their well-meaning children discovered, if you send the invitations you have to plan the party.

This real-life story leads us to our scripture with Mary, Martha who were friends of Jesus. The sisters found themselves with unexpected houseguests as Jesus was passing by their neighborhood with his disciples. Hospitality customs, then as now, dictate that when friends or relatives are nearby you invite them in for a meal. The entourage around Jesus had to be fed. Immediately, Martha gets busy to put supper on while Mary surprisingly, lingers with Jesus. She devours every word that falls from the young rabbi's mouth, enthralled with his teachings.

We are not privy to their enlightening conversation. However, if we lean into the text, one can almost hear the frustrated sighs growing deeper and deeper from Martha. When she finally emerges from the kitchen, bristling with resentment, she doesn't even address her sister directly. Instead, she goes straight to Jesus: "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me!"

Jesus stays true to himself in giving his unexpected reply. He says, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by so many things. There is need for only one thing. Mary

has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her."

On the surface one can read this as Jesus giving us an ultimatum to consider: to rebuke "busy work" with an affirmation of the spiritual life. No, something more is involved here. The story of Jesus as a guest in the home of these women does not warrant dividing believers into two classes: spiritual aristocrats and the rest of us. Instead, it challenges all of us, and does so in a way that need not separate us from each other. What's at stake lies elsewhere. A name for it is devoted discipleship.

Devoted discipleship takes many forms. It does not have to look like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus all day long. Discipleship can vary like people, expressed emotional or reasonable, extroverted or introverted, contemporary or traditional. What guides someone into devotion living is prayer, commitment, and boldness. Devoted followers live committed lives. They practice their faith with joy and enthusiasm as it spills out through service or study or devotion. It can be apparent in whatever one does. The problem with Martha is not her hospitality. It is how she lets her business become a channel for resentment. She becomes distracted and complains to Jesus. While Mary listens to Jesus, Martha presumes to tell him what he must do. It appears that Martha is driven by duty rather than delight. She may be an effective organizer, a great cook, keeping busy all

the time but she is not inspired, even on the day when Jesus himself comes to her home.

What makes Mary an example is not the simple fact that she listens to Jesus, but that she does so in a way that is devoted and spiritually open. Jesus does not so much commend her behavior as the spirit behind it. Mary chooses to take some risks. She takes the chance of upsetting her sister: Mary's not helping, she's listening. She also risks upsetting plenty of people because she takes the role of a disciple, sitting at the teacher's feet. This is not something women in her society do. This pleases the Lord, for Jesus seeks followers not just admirers. Theologian Soren Kierkegaard explains, "The Lord claimed to *be* the way and the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6). For this reason, he could never be satisfied with adherents (followers) who accepted his teaching – especially with those who in their lives ignored it or let things take their usual course. The follower aspires with all his strength to be what he admires."

Jesus invites all of us who are worried and distracted by many things to sit and rest in his presence, to hear his words of grace and truth, to know that we are loved and valued as children of God, to be renewed in faith and strengthened for service. Jesus wants us to be followers in our daily lives. Each day we can set out to follow Jesus. Where do you go hear God's voice? Each of us might answer that differently. We come to church, sing the hymns, take communion. We read the scriptures, pray. We go outside and try to remember how beautiful the

sky is, or the ocean, or the trees, or the hills. Say thank you, even if you aren't feeling thankful.

Last week I received a prayer from a friend: He wrote this prayer to begin the day. *"God when I look around, I am amazed at all You have done and created. You created the leaves that blow in the wind, the wind itself. You make the sky and the trees- and yet You took the greatest delight in creating us. Thank you for showing us endless grace and love. Thank you for giving us life and purpose. In Jesus name."* We see the world as a gift from God when we take the time to pray and listen for God.

The God who created avocados and sweet corn on the cob, the Holy God who let down manna from heaven, the resurrected Jesus who had a fish fry on the beach, is the God of grand dinner parties, soup kitchens, snacks, and family meals. God is never against cooking or hosting or the effort that makes gatherings possible. The Lord offers abundant life if we will take time to listen. For that young rabbi Jesus is spiritually everywhere. Delight in Jesus. Savor him. Choose the better way.



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630
www.westminster-church.org