

8th Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 11c
Gen 18:1-10a
Church
Psalm 15
Colossians 1:15-28
LUKE 10:38-42

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Just one thing. Martha was asking Jesus for just one thing.

She was bold to ask, because Jesus was a family friend. He often stayed with Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus. He knew how things were in that house.

So Martha didn't hesitate. You can almost see her wiping her hands on her apron, saying, "Jesus, I'm not asking for much. Just one thing. I'm not asking you to walk on water. I'm not asking you to still a storm. I'm not asking you to feed 5,000 people, in fact, you don't have to feed anyone at all – but it just so happens that I do have to feed quite a few people tonight. So would you please do this one thing? Would you get Mary to come out to the kitchen and give me some help?!"

Ah, Jesus knew how things were in that house. I can imagine him shaking his head gently and placing a hand on her shoulder. "Martha, Martha, if I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times. You are worried and distracted by many things; there's need of only one thing. And tonight Mary has chosen that one thing." Mary, of course, was sitting at Jesus' feet, drinking in his presence and his words.

Now, I've spent many years in Bible studies sticking up for Martha. Lots of us have. We've suggested this story is about two contrasting personality types -- whether you're a Martha-type (task-oriented, detail-focused, a "doer") or whether you're a Mary-type (big-picture person, visionary, contemplative). We've said there's a place for both kinds of people in God's kingdom, and there is. Somebody has to work in the kitchen, after all!

But this story is not really about personalities. It's not about Martha and it's not about Mary. Instead, it's about how all of us relate to God. It's about how being worried and distracted can keep us from paying attention to the one thing that matters—which is our Lord.

"Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things." We certainly don't know anything about that!

We don't know anything about waking up at 5:00 in the morning with that feeling you've forgotten something. Was it an appointment you missed, or some task you didn't finish, or some person you should have contacted? Waking up worried and distracted. Maybe not sleeping at all because of the bills that need to be paid and the job that needs to be found.

We don't know anything about interpersonal conflicts that can worry and distract. Like the jealousy and resentment that was simmering there between Martha and Mary. Like that disagreement that's been simmering between us and our coworker, pulling us away from the work we're given to do. We've never been "worried and distracted by many things."

We've never done what a friend of mine did when she was a young, busy mom. Stopped at a red light with her two rambunctious little kids in the car. One of them threw a french fry down on the floor and without thinking, this mom reached down to pick it up. Her foot came off the brake and she rolled right into the car ahead of her. Worried and distracted.

We've never done what those two airline pilots did when they were so engrossed in fussing with their laptop computers that they overshot the Minneapolis airport by 45 minutes. Well, we've never gotten distracted while piloting an airplane, anyway, though there are those emails and facebook pages and video games and television programs that do occasionally hijack our attention.

And what about those low-level anxieties that linger just below the surface, the ones we keep pushing down, pushing away... "What, me worried? No, I'm cool as a cucumber. Really I am." Only we're not. Truth is, we're worried and distracted.

It's so pervasive that one of my friends jokes there ought to be a 12-step program for it. He says he'd be the first one to sign up. He'd go into the meeting and say "Hi, I'm Peter and I'm worried and distracted." And everyone would say, "Hi, Peter." Because all of us are in the same boat. Mary may have been paying good attention to Jesus that particular day, but there were other days. She's no different from any of us. (Thanks to Rev. Peter Buehler and his sermon 7/7/10 at the ACTS DMin in Preaching program for this idea and the sermon opening)

And here's the issue with being worried and distracted. It's taking us away from God. It's pulling our attention away from the Creator and Giver of Life, our Savior. To all of us Jesus says, "There is need of only one thing." To know our Lord. To place our relationship with God at the very center of our lives.

This is not the only time scripture speaks about this one thing necessary. Remember the rich ruler who came to ask Jesus about eternal life? Jesus saw that this man's distraction was wealth, so he said: There's just one thing. "Sell your

possessions and then come, follow me.” Walk and talk with me. Sit at my feet. Learn and follow. Turn from your many things to this one thing. (Lk 18:18-30)

Jesus also had a word for those who are distracted by their need, those who are anxious about not having enough. Jesus said, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. ... Instead, strive for God’s kingdom” -- just this one thing -- “and [the rest] will be given to you as well.” (Lk 12:22-31)

Just one thing. Follow me. Seek my kingdom.

The one thing necessary is our relationship with God
being God’s person
receiving God’s love for us
letting God’s love flow through us.

God comes first. And when our relationship with God is in place, then all the other worthy priorities can find their proper order too.

The one thing necessary is God.

Spending time with God, cultivating time to sit in the presence of our Lord.

What did Mary do?

She sat

She listened to Jesus

Yes, she put off her chores – she did – in favor of being, just being, in the presence of her Lord.

Just this one thing.

It can be as simple as stopping

Taking a deep breath

Calling ourselves to an awareness of God’s presence

Pausing to return thanks

Just this one thing is what grounds and centers us.

To worship God

To be in relationship with Christ

To sit at the feet of our Savior

To stand by a mountain lake and praise the Creator

To look up at the night sky and open our heart to God’s light shining in the world’s darkness.

Just one thing.

To open our hands to receive bread and wine

To rejoice at the trickle of water over a baby’s head

To marvel at the miracle that any newborn is

To marvel at the love that claims baby Finn today as child of God

To be drawn into the miracle of God's love given so freely to every one of us
To open our hearts to God, rest in God's presence, knowing we are accepted and
embraced by unconditional lovingkindness
These are not many things, but just one thing. Being with God.

And here's the gift that sustains us through all of life:
As we go all the many places and do all the many things,
God offers Godself to us as the one thing we truly need.
The one eternal love that never lets us go.
Our source. Our hope.
For all of us who are worried and distracted by many things, there is just this one
thing we truly need. And it is already ours. It can never be taken from us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.