

Luke 10:38-42

It never fails...when our ladies serve a meal in the basement, as they did again on Thursday after Clara's funeral, people stand by the dessert table and exclaim, "There are just too many to choose from!" It might be easier on our guests if all we had was one big bowl of pudding. We don't give our pets a buffet line. We give them their dog food or cat food--whichever bag happens to be it for the week--and they eat it. They don't know all the different types of food sold in the stores. They're just happy to be fed. But people are choosy. Do we eat beef, pork, chicken, or fish? Potatoes or rice? Beans, corn, peas, or a salad? Bread, rolls, biscuits, or muffins? And for dessert?...the choice is endless.

When Jesus came to the home of Mary and Martha, Mary sat down like a dog or a cat at her food dish and ate. But Martha stood at the buffet line and was distracted because there was so much to choose from. Mary may have been, and probably was, doing something when Jesus came. But whatever it was, like a hungry pet running to its food dish, she sat down at Jesus' feet when He opened His mouth to teach. She had chosen "*the good portion,*" is how our Lord puts it. And it "*would not be taken away from her.*"

That good portion is always set before you here in God's House. The teaching that goes on here is not Pastor Bell's teaching; it's Jesus' teaching. Your pastor may prepare and preach the sermons, but it's Jesus doing these things through him. And the food on the Table of the Altar is that same good portion--Christ Himself for you.

The food is here--the good portion which Mary was devouring--but like Martha, we who have the food set before us in church, bring our buffet lines with us. We bring our distractions. Do we balance the checkbook, take a peek at our incoming text messages, or plan our week within our mind? Do we think about what's going on in politics, or in the world of sports, or do we wrestle with a problem we're dealing with?

Martha's buffet line was to do the many preparations in the kitchen which were required in order to set a meal before Jesus. It's not that she was distracted with sinful things. In fact, her distractions were quite noble. Serving the Lord is not wrong. It is the right thing to do...except when the good portion is set before us. Let me give you some extreme examples to clarify. Is it right or wrong to sing a hymn of praise to the Lord? We would all agree that it's right and proper. But if you stand up to sing at the top of your voice during the middle of the sermon, it's wrong. Is it right or wrong to clean up the church grounds...picking up trash and sweeping off the sidewalks? Again, we would all say that this is right. But if it's done during the worship service, it's wrong. What Jesus told Martha on the day when He came into her home, and which He also tells us today in our text, is that nothing we do for Him should take priority when He is giving His Word to us.

And this is not self-evident. It took a lot of nerve for Martha to come out of her kitchen and not only scold her sister, but indirectly reprimand Jesus for keeping Mary from helping. Martha not only thought she was in the right...she knew she was right. There was too much to do to be sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Martha's today--and there is some Martha in all of us--think the same way. When there is work to be done, everything else just has to wait. And we lump sitting at Jesus' feet in with "everything else." We are convinced, as Martha was, that our buffet line with everything on it that we have to do, is more important even than sitting, like Mary, at Jesus' feet.

The world is not as noble with their distractions. People of the world also have a buffet line. They are distracted with living. Making money, raising a family, staying fit, building friendships...the list is endless, like a dessert table. And because sitting at the feet of Jesus is not even on their "to-do-list," they stand at their buffet lines seven days a week and never consider the good portion of the words of Jesus. The good portion is here in church on Sundays and other holy days, but the people of the world are always at their buffet lines. They're out working at their job. They're mowing their yard. They're relaxing on the golf course or in their home. They're not Mary's or Martha's. The people of the world do not sit at Jesus' feet, nor do they care to serve Him a meal in their kitchen.

It's not that there is no good portion for them. God sent His Son to die for every sinner. There is not a man, woman, or child alive today who does not have a Savior. Jesus bore the sins of all. The gospel of salvation is for you, and for everyone out there. The good portion--the one food which gives eternal life because it is the Word of Christ that gives such life--is a gift God wants all people to have.

But we cannot work for it. There are many Martha's today who believe strongly that the good portion is not Jesus' words and sacraments, but their love and service to Him, to their family, to their neighbor. There are Martha's today--and again, this Martha lives in all of us--who seek God's grace and a place with Him in heaven not by listening, but by doing...not by being a Mary, but by being a Martha.

Yet, if they were right, Jesus would have said so. But He does not. Rather, He points to what Mary is doing--sitting, listening, receiving--as that which is the good portion. Martha's do not get to heaven by working, but Mary's get to heaven by listening with believing ears.

Today your Lord calls you to be a Mary. Repent of your sin. Repent of neglecting the good portion; of being so distracted with the buffet lines, that you have placed your work for God ahead of His words for you.

God forgives. He forgives Martha's. He forgives Mary's, for no Mary listens and believes perfectly. He forgives you. And the more you are a Mary, the more His words come into your ears and heart, He will be at work in you confirming your faith, making you steadfast.

By nature, none of us is a Mary. By nature we resist sitting at Jesus' feet listening to His words of life. But Jesus has overcome our sinful nature, and He draws you to the good portion and He fills you with His gifts. People can walk away from all this, and many do, but Jesus will never take His gifts away from you. His words to Mary are also for you...*"the good portion...will not be taken away from (you)."* Whenever you come here to the feet of Jesus, He will always open His mouth to give you His gifts. Amen.