

Setting the Record Straight
A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
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Luke 10:38-42, the Story of Mary and Martha
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In today's modern world, news stories evolve. A story is reported. It's placed on the Internet, and within a few short hours, there are additions and corrections. And there are follow up stories. As the story gains momentum, all parties are interviewed and re-interviewed. And in many cases, there are follow-up interviews on the anniversary of when a story was first reported. On this, the anniversary of Jesus' visit to the home of Mary and Martha, we thought the good folks of Sardis would be interested in hearing a few reflections from the story's three main characters: Martha, Mary, and Jesus.

And in so doing, we hope their comments may clear up any misunderstandings about Luke's account of this event. May we present, Martha, Mary, and Jesus:

Martha:

Hi. My name is Martha. I'm a planner. I am. And planners are needed. People think worship happens spontaneously. People think meals just make themselves, and that brooms have little legs that sweep the floor for you. But I don't think that's true. I think God gives us hands and feet to do the work we're intended to do. And I think God expects us to do that work.

And let me be clear. I think we build good relationships with others by being dependable, by completing our tasks, by paying attention to the little things.

And when Jesus came to my house, I wanted him to know that he mattered. I wanted him to be comfortable. And I wanted our house to hum along with precision so that he didn't have to worry about anything but being present in our home.

When I saw my Lord, I wanted to busy so that he knew I was busy with love for him.

Mary:

Hi. I'm Mary. And I'm a seeker. It's not that I'm opposed to daily chores. I know they're important, I just don't want to be bogged down by them. Sometimes, special things happen. Sometimes you get to meet special people. Sometimes you find yourself in special moments where all that matters is the moment itself.

And Jesus, well Jesus was special. Every time I was in his presence, I knew I was in the presence of something bigger than myself. He spoke of God's kingdom. And he spoke of the role everyone can play. And he allowed me to sit at his feet like all the other disciples, and to listen, and to learn, and to contribute. He didn't shew me away into a backroom or a kitchen, nor did he infer my presence or my intellect or my curiosity about theology were things to be hidden away.

When I saw my Lord, I had to show my love by being present, by hanging on his every word.

Jesus:

Hi. My name is Joshua, but you probably know me as Jesus. Let me just start by telling you how much I enjoyed spending time at the home of Martha and Mary, and their brother Lazarus. For someone who traveled as much as I did, finding little sanctuaries, places where I could call home, was important. These ladies always kept a home for me.

Martha was the consummate host – she kept her house the perfect blend of tidy and cozy. She always made sure to do the little things that made a big difference, but so often go without notice: there were always clean sheets and clean towels; she knew I liked the corner pieces of her brownies; she always displayed fresh cut flowers to add a little cheer to my day; my coffee cup was always refilled before I could even think to ask; every dinner conversation was accompanied by the perfect meal – Martha hosted with the precision of a concierge or an English butler. Martha loved me in the tedious details. And when I needed someone to take care of me in times where I was too busy or too tired to take care of myself, Martha was my rock. She built a sanctuary for me. Thanks be to God for Martha!

And Mary. Well Mary was a bit more laid back than her sister. She wasn't a planner or an organizer. She was one who knew how to be present. She was the type of person who could lean elbows-in to a table made sticky by Kool-Aid stains, or sit on a carpet scattered with Cheerios and cookie crumbs, and she wouldn't worry one bit. I preached a lot of sermons, told a lot of stories, engaged in so many discussions. And let me tell you, I stared into too many empty eyes, too many folks uninterested, or unwilling to receive the news I was called to share. But not Mary. Mary was genuinely interested in what I had to say. On those dark days when my disciples didn't get it, or when I thought my ministry was in vain, I'd remember Mary, and her affirming gaze. And that gaze helped give me the confidence to keep speaking, keep teaching, keep ministering to others. Mary loved me in the moments where I needed to be heard, needed to feel that others felt like I felt. Mary was my rock. She built a sanctuary for me. Thanks be to God for Mary!

Martha and Mary made me a home.

Martha:

Okay, I'll admit it. On several occasions when Jesus came to my house, I got a little carried away. I was so concerned about being a good host that every once in a while I forgot to enjoy the presence of my guest. I wanted my house to be the perfect setting for Jesus, because he was my Lord. And he deserved it.

But I'm human. And I suppose I can be a little jealous. Mary was so funny. And so easy-going. She had this way of making everyone feel at ease. And she didn't have to lift a finger to do it! If I'm honest, I'd tell you I'd have found her much funnier if she had told some of her jokes while helping with the dishes, or being a tad more empathetic to those who were doing the work around her.

And every once in a while us human beings vent. We wonder aloud why others don't see the world the way we do. And there were a few times when I asked Jesus that question. I didn't understand why he wouldn't point out to my sister that I was exhausting myself while she "lived in the moment."

But he was kind and gracious. He had this way of reminding me that my work was important, but so too was Mary's. And as I look back on it all, I think Mary and I made a good team. And I think we made a good home for Jesus when he was here.

Mary:

My sister and I are different. She was so buttoned-up, so prepared. She thought of things I could never have imagined. Our household wouldn't have run without her. But sometimes, she could be a little over the top. Sometimes, she had a hard time letting things just be, and just happen.

And I have to tell you, she set a hard standard to live up to. Sure, I could have run a household...right into the ground!!! My gifts were less tangible. I knew how to listen. I knew how to make conversation with anyone I ever met. And somehow, somehow, God gave me this innate ability to connect with others. I wasn't shy about being open. I could share my feelings. And I had no trouble offering a prayer, or visiting a sick friend, or finding ways to offer encouragement. And I could add life to a party.

And if I'm honest with myself, I should have been more empathetic toward my sister. She worked hard, and there were some days where I probably helped stir her into a frenzy, or where I didn't encourage her to rest. And I know for certain there were times when her feelings were hurt. She'd devote such effort to hosting Jesus and the disciples. And then we'd gobble down her meal, and leave her to clean dishes while we discussed theology.

It's funny. I think the work I did was less tangible than Martha's, but the attention I received from Jesus was more tangible than that given to Martha.

I see that now. But I also know this. Jesus loved us. And he appreciated our varied gifts. And as I look back on it all, I think Martha and I made a good team. And I think we made a good home for Jesus when he was here.

Jesus:

Please remember that Luke's a story-teller. And he only recorded a snippet of one conversation I had with two women who I respected very much.

If you read his account in a hurry, you may make the mistake of believing that I thought more of Mary than Martha, or that I think a devotion to daily tasks is a lesser path.

If you believe this, you have read too fast, and too carelessly.

On one occasion, ONE OCCAISION, I reminded Martha that her tasks had distracted her from my presence. She was seeking to do something nice for me, but in that seeking, she exerted so much effort in trying to help me, she lost sight of her purpose: to enjoy my presence.

And yes, Mary listened at my feet. But pay attention. She listened. Like you, she knows my teaching, a teaching that calls everyone to servanthood.

And if you've read John's gospel, you know that both of these women were extraordinary servants. When their brother Lazarus died, it was Martha who dropped her tasks, ran to me, and proclaimed, "My

Lord!” And it was Martha who believed I had the power to heal her brother. And it was Mary who served me also. We wept together at Lazarus’ death. She offered friendship and consolation when I needed it most.

So hear this friends: Every household needs servants like Martha and Mary. God’s kingdom is a collection of both task-oriented and relationship-oriented individuals who combine their gifts to celebrate and recognize God’s presence when it comes near.

And as I look back on it all, I think Martha and Mary made a good team. And I think they made a good home for me when I was here.

Sardis Baptist Church, what kind of home will you make for me?