

DINNER ROLES**Luke 1:38-42****(Read Luke 10:38-42)**

Intro: My mother was a Martha. When you showed up at her home you had better be ready to eat. She was a product of the depression with its scarcities, and because of that her house have every nook and cranny filled with goodies. Mother also had three freezers all filled to the top. So, when guests arrived she would set about to whipping up an amazing meal that was always wonderful. And each meal was topped off with Turkey Hill or Breyers Ice Cream or a Shoo Fly or Funny Cake Pie she had miraculously ready on the counter. If she knew we were coming she would inquire which of our favorites and she should have it ready when we arrived. Mother's love language was service and she served and served and served. Mother was a Martha. But often times her service meant that we didn't see much of her as she scurried about the kitchen cooking and chopping and boiling and plating. But Daddy would rope her in with "**Mother, come sit down so we can pray!**" And so she would. And we'd pray. And then . . . **SHE WOULD BE RIGHT BACK UP**, retrieving this salt shaker or that hot sauce or this different kind of butter. And Daddy would say again, "**Kathryn! Will you sit down and eat with us!**" And she finally would.

Sit down.

For a little while.

Until she needed to get out the ice cream or cut the pies. **Mother was a Martha.**

Marthas are good. They are *really* good. They are servers extraordinaire.

The passage immediately preceding this one in Luke 10 is the parable of the **Good Samaritan** which is an unmistakable example of service that is far above and beyond the call of duty. The implication is that it is indeed the call of duty for a Christ Follower to go the extra mile and pay the extra cost and take the great risk, because that is what Christ Followers do – because that's what Christ would do. We are called to be good and faithful servants.

But Mary just sat there. Jesus had perhaps dozens of people with him and maybe more. Last week we talked about thousands who followed him. As a matter of fact, the opening verses of chapter 10 record how Jesus sent out 72 disciples on ministry missions. So, this isn't just a little luncheon with just Jesus and maybe just his 12 disciples – there most likely were a lot of people who arrived at Martha's house. And she had invited them in and Mary, her sister, just sat there.

Martha worked and Mary sat. It's the ingredients of a conflict. It's also a Lesson from the Dinner Table. And this particular lesson is pretty straight forward and it's about Dinner Roles. Let's look at those roles.

First...

Martha Welcomed, Mary Worshipped

- Martha may have already known Jesus at this point. We know from John 11 that Martha and Mary are the sisters of Lazarus and that the three siblings had a deep friendship with Jesus. Regardless of where this encounter is in that friendship – Martha saw Jesus and his friends coming and she welcomed them all into her house.
- This is the kind of hospitality that happens just about everywhere else in the world, except for here. Back in 1999 I was on an investigative trip with Mennonite Central Committee to Honduras and Nicaragua a year after Hurricane Mitch had devastated those two countries. I have many vivid memories from the trip but one that will always percolate to the top is when, as our group drove through a little village, some of the villagers noticed our leader, whom they knew, and flagged us down to stop and visit. (Tell the story) They gave up their meager and delicious meal for us. Welcoming is good. We've established that over the past month.
- But worship is better. Yes – service is good. It's essential. But worship is what you do first. In fact, worship is what prepares you for service. So Mary just sat there. But she was just sitting there – at the feet of Jesus. Verse 39 says that Mary *sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching*. This is an unmistakable description of a disciple who is completely wrapped up in what her teacher is saying. This is unusual because, Mary, being female, would have been an extremely unusual student in a male dominated world. But not in Jesus's world. It was not out of place. Jesus's students are both sexes. His teaching is for everyone. So Mary sat at his feet in worshipful attention.

- Two more roles at this dinner are...

Martha Prepared, Mary Listened

- Now this one is similar to the previous one, but hear me out. Like my mother and, frankly, like my wife, Martha wanted everything to be just perfect. I suspect she had servants and she was supervising the meal prep in a flurry of activity. The bread had to be perfect. The meat needed to be perfectly done – not too pink and definitely not too done. The wine needed to be poured without dripping it on the guests. And, OH KNOW! we forgot to wash the guest's feet!

So much to do!

So little time!

So little help!

Martha had a servant's heart, but her heart was getting frustrated.

- Because Mary wasn't helping. She wasn't even in the kitchen. She was not even trying! Mary was listening. She was hearing life in Jesus's words and she could not take her ears off of him. She may have had similar thoughts to what are in a sweet old hymn that begins *Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life*, and later continues,

Christ, the blessed One, gives to all wonderful words of life;

Sinner, list to the loving call, wonderful words of life;

All so freely given, wooing us to heaven.

That's what his words do to the soul of the one who truly listens. So Mary wasn't being selfish – she was enfolded by words that put eternity in her heart. Mary listened because she could do no less.

- Still, here are two more roles...

Martha Moved, Mary Sat

- Again, this is similar – but I'm making a point because Jesus is making a point. Martha's kitchen was a scene of tornadic activity as she moved from this pot and that jar and wielded this knife. She moved with frenetic yet deliberate activity. She did this because this was Jesus, the one some thought was the promised Messiah – everything needed to be just so for the Messiah! Where's Mary?!!!!
- Mary was sitting. We've established that. As her sister worked, Mary was sitting at the feet of this riveting rabbi. There is no indication she even noticed all the activity of the meal being prepared. Is she a NARCISIST?! No, Mary was sitting, listening, and worshipping, at the feet of Jesus.
- But that made the roles into hot and very cross buns. **MARTHA WAS TICKED**. So we see finally that...

Martha Worried, Mary Won

- Martha had had enough! She finally blew! I picture the time my mom was a little behind in meal prep and so she put dried beans in a pressure cooker to hurry the cooking process. **Bad idea!** The pressure cooker exploded. The lid hit the ceiling above the stove and black beans coated most surfaces of the kitchen. My dad rushed to see if Mother was hurt and he entered the room just as she got up from behind the kitchen table with beans running down her face and stuck in her hair. She wasn't hurt . . . until Daddy started laughing at the sight and then she got ticked.
- Martha had been building up pressure and she blew. "*Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.*" Luke 10:40. Everybody was included in her frustration. Of course, Mary took a hit – "*my sister has left me alone!*" But also Jesus, the Messiah, "*Do you not care?!*" Our text says she was "*distracted with much serving*". That word "distracted" means to be torn apart. She forgot her mission to welcome and serve, and ended up worried and angry. One commentator writes here, "*To just about everyone else present, Martha's serving probably appeared to flow from a gracious servant heart. But Jesus discerned differently. He saw that Martha was serving out of anxiety, not grace.*"
- Now, Jesus could have said, "Martha, calm down!", but Jesus, being God, and all-knowing, knew the lack of wisdom in saying that to a woman. Instead he lovingly says in a very kind way, *Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things*, Luke 10:41. You are serving is such a wonderful way, but Mary has chosen the "one thing necessary," and the "good portion."
- This was not about winners and losers, but Mary won. She'd done the right thing. Soup would have been better when the choice was between a gourmet meal and sitting at the feet of the Master. One writer points

out “*At that moment, Mary was more enthralled with Jesus than with Mary. She cared more about what Jesus said than what others thought of her or her home. And because of this Jesus commended her choice not to serve.*”

- Here is my point, we need to just forget ourselves and sit at the feet of Jesus.

Conclusion: As Christ Followers we have different roles. The most important is one is sitting at his feet and learning and then all other roles fall into place. F. B. Meyer makes this important point, “*Mary and Martha each gave of her best. Each had her own sphere; one ministered to his physical need, the other to his heart. The mystical and practical are both required in Christ's service, and blend at his feet. Don't live for many things, but for him.*”

Donald Miller writes this in a similar vein, “*Service to Jesus must not be misdirected to such an extent that a person has no time to learn from him; one honors him more by listening to him than by providing excessively for his needs.*”

Of all the roles we can have in this lesson from the dinner table with Jesus, this one is the one that will most nourish our souls. Amen.