

**The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**July 16-17, 2016**  
**Luke 10:38-42**

***“Serving and Listening”***

Again this week, our world seems to be spinning out of control: funerals for citizens and police officers who were victims of shooting; another terrorist attack in France – this time in Nice on Bastille Day; a coup attempt in Turkey. We live in turbulent and uncertain times. May the Lord have mercy upon our world. In the midst of all this, it is the height of summer when we travel to visit family or friends, or people come to visit us. Think family reunions, a week at the beach with everybody, or getting together with all your relations. A big part of this is hospitality – making guests comfortable and ensuring that everybody has what they need. But what about the people who don't help? In fact, never help? What about *those* people who never lift a finger to prepare meals or clean up afterward, but are sure there to eat those meals? Yup – you know what I'm talking about here. I'm thinking about those nineteen youth and adults from our congregation who are joining 25,000 youth and adults from across the country for the LCMS National Youth Gathering in New Orleans that is now underway. The hospitality needed to host such a huge event boggles the mind! Hospitality is what we hear about in today's Old Testament lesson (Genesis 18:1-14) as Abraham and Sarah receive the three divine guests who make known that Sarah will have a baby next year. And we hear about Mary and Martha's hospitality in the Gospel lesson (Luke 10:38-42) as they welcome Jesus into their home. Important as hospitality can be, is there something more important that needs to be lifted up? That's what we we'll focus on in the message for today under the theme, “Serving and Listening.” May the Lord's rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus' sake.

Let's be honest here: I feel for Martha. In fact, sometimes I *am* Martha – scary. She's a person who gets things done. She's probably the oldest sibling; responsible, hard-working, and likely someone who wants to please others. She invites Jesus into her home. Once he is comfortably ensconced on the couch, she runs around getting drinks and snacks, and probably even throws something in the crockpot for dinner while getting out the good china and Grandma's silver because it's a special occasion and she wants to make a good impression on her guests. Martha's sister, Mary, however, is more into talking and listening. She sits on the floor at Jesus' feet and actually engages him in conversation, hanging on his every word. And that's where things start to unravel. Mary isn't helping Martha get things ready. All the prep for dinner is falling on Martha. Mary is just sitting there with Jesus, enjoying the one-on-one time with him, more or less oblivious to everything else. Ever find yourself in a situation like this? If you have, then you know the storm clouds are brewing on the horizon and before long, that storm is going to let loose.

In modern psychological jargon, Martha is trying to triangulate Jesus. Rather than speak directly to her sister about her frustration – the person she is really upset with – Martha talks with Jesus instead: **“Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me”** (Luke 10:40). And so you end up with a triangle of communication between three people instead of a direct line of communication between two people. This is almost never a good thing, but it happens all too often in our relationships. When we get frustrated and irritated with someone, we may be prone to talk to everyone except the person we're frustrated and irritated with! Don't do this. Take responsibility for your own feelings and “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), give voice to your feelings to the person who needs to hear them. How might Martha talk today? Maybe something like this: “Lord, Mary is a slacker. Look at her! She's just sitting there on the floor talking when there's work to be done. It's not fair! What are you going to do about it, Jesus?” But Jesus refuses to get triangulated by Martha and will not get caught up in her drama. What he does tell her is not what Martha was expecting to hear: **“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her”** (Luke 10:41-42). There will always

be duties and responsibilities demanding our time and energy, but sometimes there is a greater, more important opportunity staring us right in the face – a relational opportunity, a divine appointment that we dare not ignore.

This passage of Scripture often gets cast with Mary as the “good girl” and Martha as the “bad girl.” Mary made the good choice and Martha made the bad choice. We’re supposed to be like Mary and not like Martha. Really? I don’t think that’s accurate. If we look at the context of where this passage lies, it’s smack dab in the middle between two other passages, the first of which deals explicitly with hospitality and serving. This is the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), which we heard as the Gospel lesson last Sunday. And Jesus ended that parable by saying: **“You go, and do likewise”** (Luke 10:37). The second passage which follows the story of Mary and Martha is Jesus teaching his disciples to pray (Luke 11:1-4ff.). Here Jesus gives us that model prayer, what we call the Lord’s Prayer, thus lifting up the importance of prayer and listening. Can it be that it’s not either/or, but both/and? It’s not *either* hospitality and serving *or* prayer and listening. It’s *both* hospitality and serving *and* prayer and listening. It’s not pitting one against the other as though one is right and the other wrong. The problem comes when we are distracted, anxious, and troubled, as Martha was. Jesus wasn’t condemning Martha’s serving and her hospitality, but He was pointing out that her underlying distraction, her anxious and troubled spirit, was taking her places that were not life-giving. If that was true for Martha, it’s true for us as well. We can be just as distracted with prayer and listening as we can be with serving and hospitality. We can have an anxious and troubled spirit while we’re spending time with Jesus and sitting at his feet.

Whether we are engaged in hospitality and serving or listening and praying, Jesus calls us to choose the good portion; that one thing which is necessary. And Jesus himself is that good portion; He is that one thing which is necessary. When we find ourselves distracted, anxious and troubled in spirit, it is time to return to Jesus. He invites us to come to him with all our burdens and cares: **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”** (Matthew 11:28). The One who laid down his life for us on the tree of the cross is the One who can give us that rest, and bestow on us something which we seek and long for, but which often is so elusive: peace. This is the gift our Prince of Peace brings – **“...the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:7).

As we join Jesus on his mission in daily life, both serving and listening are included in those five mission practices. Mission practice #2 is hearing from Jesus, something which Mary did and which we also are called to do. Mission practice #4 is doing good, which Martha did and which we also are called to do. Serving and listening – both are needed in this community of faith, and in our world today. It’s not either/or, but both/and. At the heart of this is Jesus himself, that one thing which is necessary and our good portion. Amen.