

Sermon Notes: July 17, 2022 **Focus:** Martha and Mary [Lectionary Readings](#)

This is a familiar story about the spiritual winner: Mary of Bethany. However, it has also been rough on women and non-mystics over time. In practice, the church allegorizes Mary and Martha's encounter. The church celebrates Mary, but discounts Martha: "Be spiritual, don't play small ball with life." We do this without any self-awareness as we are asking people to give money and volunteer time for the ministries of the church. We would do well to be on team Mary *and* Martha.

The Gospel A woman named Martha welcomed Jesus into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so, she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

False split: Active vs Contemplative If you are prayerfully inclined, you may like Mary because she got her priorities straight. She knows what is most important: listening to Jesus. If you empathize with Martha, you know that nothing happens without sweat equity. You are tired of people just expecting things to happen out of thin air. To make things more confusing, Jesus himself calls out a winner in this story.

Mary only "won" the argument at this moment in time, at this one dinner. I can't believe the story is meant to be a model of spiritual winners and materialist losers forever. It's a story about how to balance the priorities of praying and serving.

Martha's growth (our growth) We need servants who support the mission of the church without getting lost in the weeds -- Martha was distracted by her many tasks. One can get addicted to being in a flurry of activity, while losing the reason for being so busy. Stop and think about *why* you do what you do. Holy work like sweeping, making coffee and moving tables is more fulfilling with a bigger reason. The best engaged faith is tempered by Mary's *why*. While you are doing stuff, let it be pointed toward creating a space for God's transformation. Cleaning dishes with the right mindset is a doorway to heaven. That is the very best of the Martha way.

Mary's growth (and ours) When someone is profoundly tuned into the love of God in their lives, it creates ripples that touch many. If you have sat next to someone in church who is completely plugged into worship, then you have been blessed by their presence. That is the best of the Mary way. On the shadow side, one can be so absorbed in personal development and spiritual inquiry that they see everything else as a distraction and beneath them. Ironically, too much Mary can make one callous to the feelings of others. 'Mary spirituality' is best balanced by chopping wood and carrying water - like Martha would. Pray in church and wipe down tables.

Our journey together Let's not have spiritual winners and materialistic losers. Let's work and pray that the Kingdom of God becomes more real on earth as it is in heaven. These are the needful things of interior and exterior work.

Todd