** Sermon for Sunday 21st July.**

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*Luke 10:38-42*

*At the Home of Martha and Mary*

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one.[a] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

SERMON:

Those of you with a bible or within the reach of a bible please open it up and find our verse for the day which is Lk 10:38-42.

Now I’d like you to follow in your bible this verse as we go along, and the first thing I’d like to give to you is the question of

Whose feet are you really sitting at?

I love the picture this reading creates, it is a picture of service, humility, and hospitality in the presence of Jesus, whilst paying attention to his place, all of which for us as Christians in the 21st century gives out, I think, an almost counter cultural message because we live in a day and age where…

*“look after one another”*

 *has become*

*“put number one first”*

 where service to others is usually done in the light of wanting reward and where pride has become the enemy of humility and where Jesus is nowhere near first in millions of lives…even the lives of Christians.

In this reading we meet Mary, not the virgin Mary, but Mary of Bethany or as some scholars have argued is Mary Magdalene herself, and she is the sister of Martha who has very kindly opened her home to the disciples.

 Now as a bit of background, the disciples and Jesus where wanderers and servants of G-ds word. They would have taken mission and ministry out into the world and as he stated in Luke chapter 9…

*“Take nothing with you for the journey”*

Therefore, they would have relied only upon G-ds provision through the charity of others, and on this journey, they would rest and settle in various places in order to preach, teach and bring about the word of G-d to all they meet.

The disciples where, in verse 38, on their way to the village where Martha lived, so it’s possible they had been walking for some time and where looking forward to the hospitality and rest they will receive, a chance to recharge batteries, a bit like going to some of the wonderful house groups we have here at CCHB. Indeed not just the house groups but also the church fellowship itself, did you know that we make good Martha’s, in the hospitality sense? We always open our doors to people, we welcome people in, and we never turn anyone away, you never turn anyone away, you are all the hospitality of Martha and this should be celebrated and most importantly expanded on. For example, the Martha in us doesn’t just have to be in serving others, it can be in making others feel like they belong, and with all these wonderful events we have on, we must ensure that we search for those who are sitting on their own, fetch drinks for those who can’t make the journey, smile at those who sometimes don’t deserve to be smiled at (😊 ). Hospitality is a good thing, and Jesus recognizes this, however there is a more serious, deeper message to this reading.

Martha’s sister Mary, pushed aside the hospitality and chose to sit at the feet of Jesus listening to what he said, NOW, can you imagine what that must have felt like? How amazing to sit at the feet of the man we all love and follow and just listen to him!

I know some of you may struggle with visual meditation but if you can for a moment please close your eyes if you will. Now just imagine that scene but as opposed to Mary put yourself in her place. So, look up at him however he appears to you, is he a bit tattered and worn out in dark earthen colors or in bright white splendor. Watch as he smiles at you and as his head moves when he speaks, maybe look at his prayer shawl, the tassels, the colors.

\*\*\*Open your eyes\*\*\*

You know, the images of Jesus we have in historical art are almost certainly not what he was like? As one person put it to me years ago

“George, he wasn’t a six-foot glowing Bee gee; he would have been more of a 5 ft rough looking Jew”

As a point of interest Isaiah 53 has a loose description of Jesus, very short but very powerful, and if we think about these words in the description, we can help us understand that Mary was fixating on…

 it states…

*” He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”*

Mary as she sat at the feet of Jesus, here in V39, listened to what he was saying, she must have been so occupied with his words that she phased out of everything that was being done or said around her, we’ve all had those moments where time passes by.

Now it is important to note that this “sitting at the feet of” was not just some random casual position but rather one of discipleship and submission because Jewish women in the first century where not allowed to sit at a teacher’s feet and as such this place for Mary would have been a very controversial position to be in, she was effectively being taught when women where only meant to sit on the outskirts.

*“Lord, don’t you care my sister has left me to do all the work myself, tell her to help me!”* states Martha…

Martha in a way should be commended for this concern because she clearly had a heart for deep hospitality, not only as a Jewish woman but a Jewish woman with the Lord Jesus in her house! Of course, Martha wanted everything right.

Jesus however replies to Martha’s concerns by putting the situation in order of priority, is it a priority that is only specific to this time and place in history? I honestly do not think it is.

Jesus states…

*“You are worried and upset by many things, but few things are needed or indeed only one”*

Now I have consulted a couple of commentaries on this line and most agree that it is not improbable that Jesus used words that had both an outer and inner meaning…

*“Few things are needed*” says Jesus,

Was Martha commendably putting on a good spread and tending to people’s needs with force, like every good host? If so, Jesus was stating that the “*few things”* where possibly in the outer sense meaning a simple drink and some food or a blanket would do? and the inner meaning could possibly be that all you need is your attention to him, the Lord, our hearts inclined to his words, the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters when Jesus said

 *“or indeed only one”*

Jesus is the one, the way the truth the life, he is the word and he is all that was needed so that we can learn and lean on him.

How often are we the Martha of the scriptures? Yes, we are good hosts, yes, we are wonderful companions and we open our door to our friends at home and here at church, but do we ever put Jesus last or lose him in the chaos of life?

I have a confession to make to you all, I have become spiritually lazy in the morning over the past few months. Partly because I struggle sleeping since leaving night shifts in my old job, but also because I have a demanding family life, so I have gotten into the habit and mindset that morning prayer, if it is achieved is a bonus and I shouldn’t feel guilty about this. You know the situation, get up bleary eyed, then its kids, or fatigue, rushing out to work, or food comes first…The problem is, is that if I wake up and become an instant Martha, tending to other affairs, the Mary in me is not being fed and Jesus sees a man who comes to him around mid-day…Jesus is not a mid-day savior, he is a morning, noon and night priority, calling us to sit at his feet.

Those of us with Kids, those of us with busy families, those with health issues, nans and grandads or shift workers, should morning prayer be our priority before anything and anyone else…Yes!

Now just to clarify, I use morning prayer as an example of many, morning prayer is a part of the daily office which follows the Jewish tradition on praying three times a day, a tradition we have adopted into Christianity since possibly the second century. It is the formal sitting down with prayer book and bible doesn’t have to be the daily office of readings, or the book of common prayer, or anything other, morning prayer or prayer at any time can be getting out of bed, closing your eyes, spiritually sitting at his feet and simply saying “Lord Jesus thank you for this new day, be with me Amen!” less than ten seconds it takes to sit at Jesus feet first thing in the morning, and the same at night, the point is we are becoming the attentive Mary and not the distracted Martha. And in response Jesus will say the same to us that…

*“We have chosen what is better, and this that is better will not be taken from us”-V42*

We have chosen to sit with Jesus and put him first. But aside from prayer how do we do this?

In the beginning I asked you to open a bible, this book is the most important tool we have in growing as a spiritual Mary, for it shows us who Jesus was and how we can relate to him. But from the Bible, not only do we learn the lessons of Jesus, but we also learn the lessons of service to others, of hospitality of welcome, of love and it forces us to open the door of our hearts when he and the disciples knock.

Attentiveness is something else which stands out to me in this reading, the attentiveness of Mary even at the frustration of Martha. The distractions we have in this world away from Jesus, away from church and our bibles are now at an epic level and all too often we are seen with our smart phone in our hands or holding a kindle, laptop iPad or other devices. Now these devices do give access to scripture texts and ministry bible apps but mostly these devices are gladdened with distractions that divert out attention from sitting at the feet of Jesus Christ, for example Facebook has in the past been my distraction. Mary had no iPhone or Facebook to distract her, her eyes where fixed on him, she listened to him, and placed herself in the humble position of the disciple.

How often do you turn to your bible, sit in prayer, find G-d in silence to sit at the feet of Jesus? In humility, service and Love?

Guess what? A hospitality of Martha is great, but you are called to be a Mary.

Church wardens mary, priests, mary, grandfathers mary, nans, mums, dad, old, young, new advanced theologians and those starting off. The hurt, the healed, we are all called to be and can benefit from being a spiritual Mary…

Are you or I a Mary, or a Martha?