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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“ONE THING IS NEEDED”**

Luke 10:38-42

**“Peace to”** you. **“Peace to”** your **“house.”**

? *Is anyone here longing for peace?*

● {Lk 9:51; 10:1} When the Messiah **“resolutely set out for Jerusalem”** he **“appointed seventy-two [of his disciples] and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.”**

● {Lk 10:5} He instructed them, **“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If the head of the house loves peace, your peace will rest on that house; if not, it will return to you.”** **“Peace to this house”** is the *first thing* they were to say.

**“Peace.”**

Not merely a cease-fire or an end to the latest war. That’s better than nothing; but such peace is usually only a lull in the bloodshed. Whether it is fought on the field or in the home, the so-called “war to end all wars” never does.

**“Peace.”**

Not the false peace of sweeping disagreements under the rug. Such “peace” is often worse than open conflict. The anger and tension and hurt are still there, boiling just under the surface, and in time they are likely to explode in vicious words or even physical violence.

**“Peace.”** True peace: harmony with God, with neighbor, and within yourself; the wholeness of a contented heart, sound mind, and healthy body; justice and

righteousness in every individual and corporate relationship. That kind of peace.

○ {Is 9:6; 1 Th 5:23; Eph 2:14} **“Peace”** is at the heart of the Gospel. God the Son is the **“Prince of Peace,”** sent by his Father, the **“God of peace,”** **“to [destroy] the...dividing wall of hostility”** that has existed between God and human, and human and human.

○ {Eph 2:17} To that end the Lord **“came [preaching] peace.”** So when they entered any home the seventy-two were to say, **“Peace to this house.”**

● But not everyone will receive peace: **“If the head of the house loves peace, your peace will rest on that house; if not it will return to you.”**

? It boggles the mind, does it not? *Who would deny themselves the peace of Christ?*

Even some of his friends do, as it turns out.

□ Please turn with me to Luke 10:38-42.

■ In verse 38 **“Jesus and his disciples [are] on their way”** to Jerusalem and they come **“to a village where a woman named Martha [opens] her home to him.”**

Surely, the Lord Jesus does what he told the seventy-two to do. As he enters Martha’s home he says, **“Peace to this house.”**

Yet she is not filled with the peace of Christ. His peace does not rest upon her.

Martha is not at peace within herself.

■ In verse 40 **“Martha [is] distracted by all the preparations that [have] to be made.”**

📖 **“Distracted”** is the figurative sense of a verb that literally means *pull away or drag all around*.

Luke uses the passive voice, signifying that Martha is not doing the pulling; she is being pulled. She is not dragging anything; she is being dragged.

In this case, by “**all the preparations**”: the last-minute menu planning, stoking the fire, running next door to borrow a cup of, rinsing and chopping and slicing and dicing and snipping and measuring and mixing and seasoning and cooking and roasting and baking – these diverse tasks are pulling Martha in a dozen different directions. She can hardly breathe, much less think.

■ In verse 41 Jesus observes, “**Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things.**”

Two words jump out here: “**worried**” and “**upset.**”

📖 Martha is “**worried.**” She is *anxious* and (*unduly*) *concerned*. She is *care-ful* – not that she is exercising appropriate caution; rather, she is *full of* unwarranted or excessive *care*.

Martha, Jesus says, is “**worried...about many things.**” We cannot be dogmatic about the details, but I suspect that her anxiety is centered in her role as hostess. Martha is full of care, not so much to serve her guests well, but to impress them. (*Will they be pleased with my cooking? Will they notice my culinary skills and hard work?*)

And Martha is “**upset.**” Τυρβαζω (*turbazō*) is the Greek equivalent of the Latin *turbulentus* which means *full of commotion*. Martha’s soul is turbulent. Inwardly she is a seething, churning mess. (*What if the roast is tough? I will be so humiliated! I will never live it down if we run out of wine!*)

She is “**distracted,**” unduly concerned, and upset. This woman is not at peace within herself.

Neither is Martha at peace with others.

■ In verse 40 she approaches the Son of God and addresses him. It is within the realm of possibility that she speaks calmly, coolly, in a gently inquisitive manner: “**Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?**” Might you “**Tell her to help me**”?

But the narrative flow suggests otherwise. I do not think Martha comes to Jesus at the initial stirring of inner disturbance. I do not think she approaches Christ while it is still easy to moderate her voice and demeanor. I believe she gives her anger and self-pity time to fester and feed on itself. As she stews in her own juices the pressure builds, but she pushes it down. It builds some more, so she keeps stuffing it. She stuffs it until it will not be contained, and then she explodes: “**Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!**”

Martha’s resentment and disapproval of Mary are palpable. Her impatience with, and bossiness toward, Jesus are blatant.

Honesty conversations about hurt and frustration are fertile soil for authentic peace. But tantrums and harsh criticism kill peace. This woman is not at peace with others, not even with the Prince of Peace.

Consider the incongruity.

■ In verse 38 Martha “[opens] **her home to Jesus.**” She receives him warmly. The great rabbi is no stranger; he is a friend who has graced her house with her presence on previous occasions.

■ And there is every reason to believe that Martha’s intent in verse 40 is to extend meaningful hospitality. She knows that Jesus is no ordinary person: it is not by coincidence that she calls him “**Lord.**” She sincerely wants to give her best to him.

And she does not stop at good intentions: she labors and toils and sweats, making her best effort to present the best to the man who is the best.

The great irony is that Martha does not give her best. She does not do her best. She does not present the best.

Not only so she is drained of energy, deprived of joy, and robbed of peace. This, not despite her great endeavor to serve the Messiah, but because of it!

? *Have you ever been in Martha’s shoes?*

Have you tried your hardest, given it your all, poured your heart into some ministry – only to find yourself exhausted, discouraged, and resentful toward the very people God has called you to help?

Have you ever felt the peace of Christ drain out of your soul, even as you were striving and laboring on his behalf?

I have been there, more than once.

■ The Lord Jesus has a word for us, spoken first to Martha in verses 41-42: “**you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed – or indeed, only one. Mary has chosen what is better.**”

? *What has Mary chosen that is better?*

■ In verse 39, while Martha frantically scurries around the kitchen, Mary “[sits] **at the Lord’s feet listening to what he [says].**”

○ {Eph 2:8-9} Some see this as a critique of works’ righteousness. Indeed, “**it is by grace [we] have been saved, through faith...not by works**” – but this interaction is not about salvation; it is about discipleship.

{Jas 1:22-25} Others say Mary is the serene pietist, Martha is the busy activist, and we should all be like Mary. They forget that we are called to emulate both women by hearing the Word and putting it into action.

● So where does that leave us? Just before this, in verses 25-28, Christ affirms the centrality of the commandments to “**Love the Lord your God**” and “**Love your neighbor.**” Next, in **verses 29-37** he illustrates neighbor love with the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Now, in verses 38-42, we see an illustration of loving God “**with all your heart...soul...strength and... mind.**” Martha has the opportunity to love God by serving with joy and grace; instead, her attitude drives a wedge between her and the Lord. The fact that his peace does not rest upon her is proof positive that, in this moment, her service is not an act of love.

✍ In contrast, Mary draws near to Jesus. Naturally, one could sit and listen with the bad motive of avoiding work. That is not what’s happening here. Mary sits and listens as an act of love. It draws her closer to him, and so his peace rests upon her.

(If we had we more time we could explore the way Mary is upending gender roles. To sit at a teacher's feet and listen is to learn with the intent of obeying and sharing his message. Yet the culture prohibits a female from following a rabbi. One leading rabbi teaches, in so many words, that it is better to burn the Torah than to let a woman study it. Mary is studying – and Jesus commends her for it.)

To love the Lord your God by drawing near, by quiet listening and also by active service, is “**what is better.**” It is the one thing that is “**needed.**”

○ {Is 55:2} “**Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?**” Draw near to Jesus, and his peace will rest on you!

○ {Jer 2:13} Why exhaust yourself trying to draw water from the empty cistern of self-sufficiency? Drink deeply of the presence of Jesus and his peace will rest on you!

“**Peace to**” you and your “**house.**”