

The Story of Mary and Martha

This series is meant to help us wrestle with what it means to follow Jesus.

- To be known for what He was known for
- To be like Him
- To be on mission with Him

Last week we looked at the call of Matthew the tax collector. Jesus said to Matthew, "Follow Me," and then joined Matthew and his tax collecting friends at a banquet. And Jesus invites us to follow. He invites us to feast. When we accept that invite then it requires of us that we make room at the table for others. It requires us to choose to be a people who love without labels.

Note: if Jesus is in the room... the wrong people start getting seats. And if we follow Jesus...we make room at the table.

This morning we are going to look at another story where the wrong kind of person gets a seat. It is the story of another dinner. A dinner hosted in the home of three siblings; Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. The story is not what you think.

(DISCLAIMER: to the ladies, for those of you who are mom's, "Happy Mother's Day." I also know that Mother's day can bring mixed emotions for many women. This message is not how to be a better mom. It is an encouragement that your value and worth to the world and to Jesus is found in your identity in Christ and He offers you a place at His feet. If you have been wounded by people or have been hurt in church by people who have made you feel less because you are a female or because you are not a biological mom, then please note that I am committed to changing that culture but this sermon might trigger some wounds.)

The story is found in Luke 10:38-42

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. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

What this story is not about:

It is not about choosing worship over work or worship over worry

It is not about balancing service of Jesus and sitting at the feet of Jesus

It is certainly not about making sure to prioritize your "quiet time with Jesus"

It is about Jesus redefining not only who gets a seat at His table but who gets a seat at His feet.

If Jesus is in the room...The wrong people start getting seats. And if we follow Jesus ...we make room at the table.

Wider Historical Context:

- **Jewish world:** Women were not disciples of Rabbis. They never heard the call of a rabbi, "follow me." While Judaism had a much more elevated view of women than the larger Greco-Roman society and valued women as equal covenant members with God, they did not share equal access to "intimacy" with God or service to God. They were kept in a separate outer court in Temple worship
They were restricted from the Priesthood in

They were restricted in their ability to study the Torah

"Whoever teaches his daughter Torah is like one who teaches her folly." (M. Sotah 3:4)

- **Greco/Roman World:**

The Biological framework: Aristotelian view

Male=standard "form." The fully formed human

Female=the "Matter"-incomplete human form (didn't fully develop due to lack of heat)

Led to view that men are always active/leading.

Women are always passive/submitting.

Societal framework: Paterfamilias (rule of fathers/husbands) is essential for keeping order

Emperor-Elites-freemen-women-slaves

The father/husband had absolute authority to the point that life and death of children were in his hands (law existed until 374 A.D.)

A woman's value was intrinsically tied to the number of children she could bear. Caesar Augustus made laws granting wives certain freedoms if she bore 3 children. Slave women could be granted "free-person" status if they bore 4. The children remained property of the master.

So... when Mary did what she did she was not choosing worship over work. She was crossing a boundary.

(Martha) had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

Note: Mary chose to take a seat at the feet of Jesus—a place for disciples only. She chose not to be passive "matter" but to be an active participant at the feet of Jesus.

And, her sister Martha was not happy about it. She came to Jesus and said this in verse 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!"

Note: Martha's response was expected. She saw her role. Her place was in the kitchen. Her place was doing work while others worshiped.

In her society it had never been an option to choose worship over work or discipleship over duty.

Mary not only had abandoned her to do all the work but had brought shame on the home for overstepping her boundaries.

We should not blame Martha for wanting help in the kitchen or not joining Mary.

We should blame society for not giving her the option.

But... If Jesus is in the room... the wrong people start getting seats. And if we follow Jesus... we make room at His feet.

Mary's move from the kitchen to the feet of Jesus was not expected. It certainly was probably not welcome by the men who had to make room for her. It was not appreciated by Martha.

But look again at verses 41-42 and the response of Jesus:

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

Mary has chosen the better.

She chose to sit at Jesus' feet.

She did choose worship over work and devotion over duty.

She also chose to break societal norms. She chose to push boundaries. She chose self-dignity and not be relegated to work in the kitchen and miss out on time with Jesus.

Before this moment this was never truly a choice that a woman felt like they even had. The choice had already been made for them.

But in this moment Mary didn't just sit at Jesus' feet- she sat where the world said she couldn't.

Jesus made sure she stayed. And the disciples had to make room.

Because...if Jesus is in the room... the wrong people start getting seats. And if we follow Jesus... we make room at His table and His feet.

And Jesus adds: **it will not be taken away from her.** In a world that had already taken it away from her

Jesus will not take away her place at His feet.

She belongs here-and I am not giving her back to the broken system.

Disciples should get comfortable making room

Martha, you've done enough... come join us.

Jesus didn't just come to save "souls." He re-wrote societal scripts.

He came to bring Heaven to Earth and not just take us to Heaven.

And... there is no indication when that day comes that a woman's place will be in Heaven's kitchen or that her reward will be based on how many children she had or that she will be punished if she didn't stay in her Earthly cultural lane.

So when we pray, "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be done" if we aren't pushing back against cultural norms that define women's values based upon measuring up to societal norms then what are we doing?

So Ladies,

- the number on the scale measures your weight. It does not measure your worth. Jesus' does. Come sit at His feet.

-if you are a mom by having biological children that is not all that you are. It is a role you identify with. It is not your identity. Jesus gives you your identity. Come sit at His feet.

-Everything the world tries to tell you that you should have and should do in order to be valued and lovable...everything that distracts you... please hear Jesus say, "only one thing is really needed. Come sit at my feet. I have made space for you."

Guys...

- it is up to us to not perpetuate societal norms on our sisters in Christ.

Church...

- It is up to us to actively work to reclaim the full and not partial image of God stamped on females and value them as image bearers of God and not because they meet the standard image of what the world finds beautiful or the role they serve as mom's or wives.

And we should repent of our sins for when we haven't. We should call out the bad theology of the present and the past. We can and should have hard conversations about Biblical roles of women in the church Body. That's O.K. I am all for that. But we can do that and say, it was wrong when...

Saint Augustine wrote, "I fail to see what use woman can be to man, if one excludes the function of bearing children." (The Literal Meaning of Genesis, 9:5.9)

And Martin Luther, "If they (women) become tired or even die, that does not matter. Let them die in childbirth- that is why they are there." (from his Table Talk recorded in his conversation.)

And John Calvin, "The woman is...inferior in rank..and should be subject" (Commentary on I Cor 11)

These theologians were products of their time but what looked like good theology was their culture wearing a Bible. And we can't afford to baptize the things in our culture by wrapping up what the world values and defending it with the Bible when it has no place in the Kingdom of God.

Because at Matthew's house, Jesus redefined who gets a seat at the table.

In Martha and Mary's home, Jesus redefined who gets a seat at His feet.

And in both places, Jesus refuses to give those seats back.

In both places, those who truly follow Jesus have to make room.

And it gets uncomfortable because we are prone to make lists and have labels...

People who shouldn't be at the table

People who don't deserve forgiveness

People who make us feel uncomfortable because of their politics

But... today we should remember...

We are Matthew. We are all Mary.

-We weren't supposed to be here

-We are all sinners

-At one time we were probably the one that someone else wanted to exclude

But by the grace of God, Matthew got a seat. Mary got a seat. And so did you.

Because...If Jesus is in the room... the wrong people start getting seats. And we were all the wrong people.

We are all invited to that table. We celebrate that during communion. If you are at home today, we invite you to join us by finding some bread and some juice.. and joining us as we partake it together.

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ANNOUNCEMENT: Dinners with the Townsend's. Starting Sunday May 24th we will start having small groups of individuals over to the home of Brian and Lisa's for potluck style dinners starting at 5pm. We ask that you RSVP by texting Pastor Brian at 575-571-5340 with a number of people and if there is one Sunday night that is better than others for you. Please feel free to invite a friend(s). We will work on getting small groups of 10-12 scheduled for Sunday evenings through the end of May and June. If you have any questions, reach out to Pastor Brian.