

Sermons at  
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
Reggie Denton, Pastor

July 27, 2025 (Proper 11, Year C, Christmas in July)  
Genesis 18:1-10a; Luke 10:38-42

Al and Betty Johnson live on a farm about 200 miles northeast of Rapid City, S.D. Needless to say, there isn't a Wal-Mart on every corner way out there, so whenever the Johnsons have a reason to go into the city, they keep a running list of things they want to do and need to buy, because who knows when they'll get back there again.

A while back, Betty's mother was flying in for a visit. Al made a list of all the things he needed to do on his way to the airport to pick up his mother-in-law.

When he finally got home late that evening, he was so pleased to tell Betty about all he had accomplished. He had gotten new tires put on the truck and found everything she wanted at the mall. He had even bought her a new dress that he couldn't wait to show her.

Finally, she interrupted him and asked, "Al, where's my Mom?" Al's face turned white, and then red. It seems, in his determination to complete the LIST, he'd forgotten to go to the AIRPORT. He'd forgotten the only purpose he had for going to town in the FIRST place.

Poor Al. It's easy to do, to be SO busy that you forget the ONE thing you were SUPPOSED to do.

"Only ONE thing is needed," Jesus said.

Jesus came into Martha's village to preach and teach, and Martha invited him into her home for a meal. Jesus sits down and begins to talk with those who are gathered there, including Mary, Martha's sister.

Martha looks over the scene, and begins to count noses, and to count glasses, and to check the wine supply, and tries to figure out how many plates they still have from the good china, and sends a boy out to buy fresh fish, and is there enough flour to make enough bread, and would you look at the mess in this kitchen, and how many of these people will be staying, and is there ROOM in here, or will we have to eat on the patio, and where is that tent, and oh my goodness, there's no wood for the fire, and WHERE IS MARY?

She finally gets fed up and INTERRUPTS Jesus to complain, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Martha's so annoyed with the whole business that she manages to criticize both her sister AND JESUS in the same sentence, "Don't you CARE?"

Well, actually, Jesus DOESN'T care – at least not about the things MARTHA'S worrying about: "Martha, Martha, you are 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" (verse 41).

Now, let me stop right there and DEFEND all you MARTHA'S out there.

I think of some of the older folks I've visited. They ask if I'd like something to eat, and when I decline, they bring out the food anyway, just in case I change my mind. That's just how they were brought up to treat a guest.

Martha's way of doing things can't be WRONG, can it? After all, that was ABRAHAM'S way too. Abraham was FAMOUS for his hospitality. We saw it in our first reading. He offers his guests a place to wash up and some bread, and then he goes way, WAY beyond that, for complete strangers. He has a calf slaughtered for them and brings them curds and milk. And while his guests eat, Abraham stands by, just in CASE they need something. Abraham was a Martha.

And where would the church be without all our Martha's? They're the ones who GET THINGS DONE.

So, for you Martha's, I want you to NOTICE something in this story: Jesus never says that WHAT Martha is doing isn't IMPORTANT. The work NEEDED to get done. Jesus' criticism of Martha

ISN'T about what she's DOING; it's about what she's FEELING. The story tells us that she's distracted. Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, you are WORRIED AND UPSET about many things, but only ONE thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is BETTER, and it will NOT be taken away from her."

Now Mary, SHE had done only ONE thing since the moment Jesus entered their home – she sat at the feet of Jesus. But that ONE THING was enough to draw Jesus' PRAISE. Martha was MISSING OUT on that. She was so worried about working FOR Jesus that she wasn't able to be WITH Jesus. She wasn't able to do the ONE thing that was NEEDED.

Only ONE THING, he said.

A friend told me about the hospitality of his Aunt. When she prepares a meal, she not only serves it, she ATTENDS to it. She never sits. She flits about making sure everyone has EXACTLY what they need WHEN they need it, getting an extra napkin, refilling drinks, starting dishes around for a second pass, clearing dishes from one course to the next. Only after EVERYONE else has eaten and gone to the living room does SHE finally sit down and eat – ALONE in the kitchen. She's a great hostess, but she is also MISSING OUT on something VERY IMPORTANT. Her guests came to see HER. They enjoy her meal, but they don't get to TALK with her, enjoy her company. SHE AND THEY MISS OUT on that. Do you know someone like that? I bet you do.

How much are WE missing out on? How often do we share meals TOGETHER as a family these days? How often do we sit around the table and actually talk? How many meals, how many EVENINGS, have you come away hungry for something MORE, because you never connected?

In the end, this is a story about relationships. It follows IMMEDIATELY after the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus was asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" And our Lord's response was clear, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrated the SECOND part, what it means to "love your neighbor as yourself"; THIS Gospel helps us understand the FIRST part, what it means to "love the LORD your God with ALL your heart." The story of the Good Samaritan is about loving your neighbor by DOING something; here we see Martha ALREADY DOING something. She needed to be reminded that our work is an EXPRESSION of love, NOT a SUBSTITUTE for love.

WE need to be reminded of that as well. We don't work for our families and our friends and our church and our community, because we feel obligated, or we need to meet some standards we set for ourselves, or we need others to think well of us, but because we LOVE them. And we love Jesus. True hospitality isn't only sharing our HOME; it's sharing our SELVES and our TIME with others.

You know, as humans we are the only one of God's creatures that is aware of past, present and future. This is both a blessing and a curse. We can LEARN from the past and PREPARE for the future. We spend a lot of TIME AND ENERGY THINKING about the past and future, but how much time do we actually spend in the PRESENT?

Think about it. How often do you really enjoy the MOMENT, without thinking about ANYTHING else? How often are you truly PRESENT with the ones you're with? As the saying goes, "This moment is a gift – that's why it's called the PRESENT."

Jesus said, "You are worried and upset about many things, but only ONE thing is needed." I think this is why we enjoy sitting around a camp-fire, or on a beach. There's something about those elements that draws us completely into the moment, and we can finally STOP thinking about everything else. I think that's a gift from God. Those are GOD moments.

Many of you are VERY BUSY people. You're busy in the church; you're busy in the community; you're busy in your work. You are productive. But have you found that ONE thing that is needed, that ONE thing that will transform your life and give you the peace that passes all understanding?

Take a lesson from Martha and Mary. The most IMPORTANT thing you can do is to take some TIME WITH your family, and with your friends, and sit at the feet of Jesus.

This is God's gift to you. That's why it's called the PRESENT. And so, even in July, I say Merry Christmas. Amen.