



Learning from Jesus

Luke 10:3-42

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In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus says: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Here in the Gospel of Luke we find how highly Jesus appreciated it when Mary chose to focus on his teaching rather than on preparing food.

Martha had chosen to be hostess for the amazing new Rabbi and his followers. Jesus was coming for lunch! Maybe she thought, “Hmm, shall I make four courses or five?” Her sister Mary was fascinated by what the Rabbi was teaching, but Martha thought it more important to go immediately to the kitchen to prepare to feed at least 15 people. Normal hospitality, as in most households today, meant that the women would be expected to make a nice meal for an honoured guest.

If Martha had opened her home to Jesus and the 12 disciples there must have been quite a bit of room and therefore probably money enough to provide a good meal, not just flat bread. And without modern appliances, a meal for 15 people would have taken quite a bit of time to prepare.

Martha sounds like a competent housekeeper, used to being the one in charge. It was her house. With her “Jewish Mamma” attitude it looked as if she would sweep aside opposition. She actually interrupted Jesus’ teaching session to get her point across! The Greek gives the sense of her standing over them and demanding that things be done her way. “Lord, don’t you care that Mary has left me to do all the work?” It smacks of emotional manipulation.

Jesus said, “Dear Martha, only one thing is necessary.” In other words, just a piece of bread and some olive oil would be fine. If the bread was made Druze-style, which is still made today, the women make enough for a whole month at a time. It is quite salty, so it will last, and there would quite likely be enough stored up to offer to guests without much fuss in preparation.

So it must have been a shock to her to be told, “No. Mary will not have this good thing taken from her. She has chosen well.”

It was most uncommon for women of the day to be admitted to such teaching times. Jesus disregarded that cultural norm, and Mary wasn’t going to miss out on one precious minute! But Martha was distracted – maybe wanting to impress, or to bless, but not knowing how best to please Jesus. Real people in a real-life situation.

It reminds me of a poem you might remember too: “Mops, lie down; and dust, go to sleep! I’m rocking my baby, and babies don’t keep.” That has the same strong ordering of priorities. Here is a real person I am investing in. The housework can wait for another time.

Our view of Mary is often of a meek, retiring person who just sat and listened a lot. But she was strong and stubborn when it came to things that mattered to her. This might be her only chance to learn as a disciple of such a wonderful person. And like Mary, we will account for the priorities we choose, when we come to the final Day. Jesus warns us in Matthew 7:22-23

Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

These people had been doing spectacular things in the name of Jesus, but there is something he values more highly. "I never knew you," He says. Here the word "knew" is about knowing intimately. So how can we choose well, as Mary did, to listen to Jesus and learn from him? How can we grow spiritually and know him deeply? Many of us here know that the gate or entry way to the Kingdom of God is by believing in Jesus, confessing and turning from our sins, asking him for cleansing and stepping into a new life with Jesus: the Way, the Truth and the Life.

But wait, there's more! As we follow Jesus on the Way, he wants to share his perspective, his insights, his agenda with us. It's not just a case of getting the ticket to heaven at the turnstile and living with the same priorities as we did before.

In the morning I roll out of bed, then make a cup of tea, then sit with it to warm my hands as I start to pray. I open my Bible but maybe suddenly I realise that today is my washing day and I don't know what the weather forecast is. So I get up and find my cell phone which displays the weather ...and also any messages which have come before I got up. After reading and responding to the messages, I might get up for a second cuppa and see the mess I was too tired to deal with after jam-making last night. That takes 15 mins to clear. You get the idea.

It is so easy to let our lives become clogged with the mundane, or with crises or with distracting, desirable offers from the enemy of our souls. So how to focus???... Discipline! This is an uncomfortable word to those of us brought up in the post-modern era. Choice, freedom, and options are more popular concepts.

Yesterday I got out my copy of Richard Foster's book "Celebration of Discipline." On the cover is a picture of an oyster shell containing a large pearl. Jesus tells the parable of a pearl dealer who found the most beautiful pearl he had ever seen, and went and sold everything so that he could own this gorgeous thing. It is a parable about letting go of the less valuable things in our lives, to gain the thing worth most – which is: deeply connecting with Jesus.

In his book, Foster brings alive the spiritual disciplines which guide us into habits of life. These will produce very good fruit in our lives. He explains the discipline of prayer, the discipline of meditating on Scripture, the disciplines of fasting, of silence, of solitude, of serving. These and other disciplines help bathe our lives in God's world-view. They help us to drop harmful habits. They guide our feet into the paths of the peace and joy that come from loving and obeying God.

To help the women of this church, on September 14th I am planning to run a day retreat for women based on the recent novel, "Sensible Shoes." The retreat will give a taste of these spiritual disciplines. I want to open their understanding to different methods of drawing close to Jesus and walking with him on the Way which leads to fullness of life. Please invite any woman you think might benefit from and enjoy this day retreat: Hibiscus Coast women are especially welcome.

If we think about it a little, we will recognize the ways of connecting deeply with God which come most naturally to us. Our personality type, our education, our family's style will affect how we draw near to God.

Some people draw near to God through corporate singing, others through studying Scripture, others through quiet, contemplative practices. Others sense God's presence when looking at the beauty of creation and feel the awe that rises as they realise Who made it all. The best way for each individual, will make him or her want to respond to Jesus and start a conversation.

I apologise to the men that this first retreat day is only for women, but I had to start somewhere. If some of you men find a longing rising within you to know God and be known by him, I suggest that a good place to start is in the Psalms, reading them out aloud and using them as a springboard for prayer. Maybe one of you will read Richard Foster's "Celebration of Discipline" and catch the vision to present an opportunity for the men here.

Because of Jesus' warm approval of Mary's choice, let's determine in our hearts to accept His invitation to come and sit with him, to get to know him in a deeper way.

We can start right now, trying one of the spiritual disciplines. To do this, I will read the Gospel passage aloud twice. I will read slowly. If something catches your attention, tune me out and tune into an internal conversation with Jesus. You can imagine yourself in the scene, perhaps as a servant helping wash the visitors' feet or just observing from a hidden alcove. Let the reading lead you into deeper connection with Jesus as we sit together at his feet.

Take notice of your reactions. The Holy Spirit can work with them, whether they are positive or negative.

Luke 10:38-42 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 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!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "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."