

Luke 10:38-42
Don't Just Do Something, Sit There!
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell
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Can anyone resonate with this statement: Life is incredibly busy. Is that true of any of you? You tell yourself, as soon as I finish with this project, or return these emails, then I'll be able to rest, but what happens? More projects pile up, more emails come in, more demands are placed on us, right?

When I was a teenager, my first job, which involved doing whatever my dad wanted me to do in his shop (which usually involved moving piles of lumber from one corner to another, and then moving them back again), I learned this from one of my supervisors: if you ever find yourself standing there with nothing to do, you can always push a broom.

We've adopted this mantra in our lives: "don't just sit there, do something." But what the Scriptures teach us is that being a disciple of Jesus should have this as its saying: "don't just do something, sit there." Being consumed by busy work is not only distracting, but it is also dangerous. It's the very thing that can keep us from growing as disciples of Jesus.

This morning, we're continuing to look at the characteristics of life in the Kingdom of God. What we see in our text today is that life in the Kingdom of God is not about always busying ourselves with all sorts of tasks for Jesus, but allowing ourselves to sit and being still a bit.

This morning, Jesus is invited into the home of two women, Mary and Martha, and the Bible says that **Martha welcomed Jesus**. Martha has a gift... and it's an important gift. It's a gift that many of you have, and many of you share on a regular basis—good old Midwestern warmth and hospitality. You open your homes to others with good food, drink, and comfortable accommodations. And I want to say first, that this is a beautiful thing.

In the first century when a traveler came into a village, they didn't have Travelocity or Priceline to decide what hotel to check into. When traveling teachers came into a village and came to the door, especially if it was a religious teacher, there were hospitality codes that were strictly observed. Not only were there social implications, but there were religious implications, as well. When you open your home to someone and show them hospitality, you are practicing a spiritual discipline. In fact, one of the earliest church writers, a guy by the name of Tertullian, wrote that the gift of hospitality was side by side with the gift of faith.

Jesus stands at their door, like he does to ours, and he knocks. Martha and her sister Mary literally and spiritually open the door to Jesus and welcome him in with food and drink and warm friendship. It was, for them, an act of devotion to Jesus. And in this way, Martha is a model of deep faith.

If we are going to be followers of Jesus, he tells us that a large part of our journey of discipleship will be through service. Later in Luke, Jesus says that "the greatest among you is the one who serves." Then again, "if you want to follow me, you must live for me and serve others." The greatest commandment, Jesus says, is that you love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself—and the way you love your neighbor is by serving them. Last week's text,

the Parable of the Good Samaritan, involved a man allowing his actions to overcome the barriers before him to serve another man who was in need, and the very last words of that text... do you remember what they were? “Go and do likewise.”

Living as a disciple of Jesus will always involve you and me serving one another in love. But here, in the person of Martha, is where we see the danger in placing too much emphasis on doing something for Jesus. Through her interactions with Jesus, Martha reveals *three places in which service actually drove a wedge: with one another, with Jesus, with the heart of our serving.*

First, look with me at verse 40. Martha says to Jesus, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?” Martha has a mental ledger, and on the one side it says Martha, and on the other side it says Mary, and Martha is keeping track of all the things she is doing, as well as all of the things Mary is *not* doing. Has anyone ever created one of these ledgers in their mind with their spouse or their siblings? We have a funny story in our family that when Amy and her two brothers were young, John, her youngest brother, was out in the garage helping his dad with the car. His dad was cyphoning gas from the tank when he took in a mouthful of gas. Spitting it all over the garage he asked John to get a rag and a bottle of water nearby, to which John replied: “Why do I always have to do everything? Amy and David never have to do anything.”

This is a humorous example, but the point it illustrates is not funny at all. Martha is creating one of these mental checklists, and it’s toxic: Martha—bake the bread and prepare the olive tray...check. Mary—sit there doing nothing...check. Martha—clean the house and make the beds...check. Mary—sit there doing nothing...CHECK!

The danger that Martha is encountering is when our serving breeds resentment. And resentment is one of the ugliest, most dangerous feelings we can have toward another person. How many of you have ever come up with one of those mental checklists? I have, and I’ll tell you what, they’re not hard to mask. My wife knows every time exactly when I’m starting to keep a tally. And what follows is never good.

In this way, the devil can take our service—which is a profoundly good thing—and turn it around, making it into a very harmful and ugly thing. The more Martha serves, the more resentment she has toward her sister. That’s the first thing that happens through Martha’s service.

The second place where Martha’s serving drives a wedge is between her and Jesus. Again in verse 40 she says to Jesus, **“Lord, do you not care?”** The text says she comes to Jesus with a question, but that’s not a question. Remember last week when I mentioned that the lawyer who came to Jesus asked, “and who is my neighbor?” And it wasn’t really a question, it was more like a veiled accusation, a passive aggressive attack. Martha does the same thing. She’s not saying, “Lord, don’t you care?” She is saying, “Lord, you don’t care.”

In her heart, Martha is thinking to herself, Jesus doesn’t care about me. But do you know what that is? It’s a lie. Jesus cares about everybody. Jesus wants you and me and Martha to know the goodness of being close to him. But Martha has begun to internalize the resentment, and believe the lies that it has birthed. In this moment, Martha has become blinded to the truth that Jesus has for her. Jesus says to her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things.”

And this is the third wedge that is driven in this scene. When we are worried, anxious, and all worked up about what we're doing and whether the task is evenly shared, or justly honored, when this is the case, we can never love the serving. When we see our service as an obligation, we will inevitably begin to hate them.

This is why, whenever I am recruiting volunteers for events or ministries around the church, I ALWAYS tell folks that no is always an acceptable answer. Life in service to Jesus and his church should never be something that we grow to resent. If this is where you are, if you are burned out from the path that you're on here, then you need to step away from that thing. Perhaps some of you are here because you were burned out somewhere else. Churches can be very effective at burning people out with busy work. Service to Jesus should be something that brings joy and satisfaction in growing as a disciple of his—now, it doesn't mean it will always be easy; sometimes service is hard, but it shouldn't breed resentment.

No matter why or for what reason you're here this morning, this is the perfect place to begin in the journey with Jesus. Verse 42 Jesus says that **only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.** Notice that Jesus doesn't say that what Martha is doing is wrong or bad. Service is a good thing, it's just not the best path.

The best path that Mary has chosen is to sit at the Lord's feet and listen to what he says. And sometimes that looks like sitting there and doing nothing at all. Don't just do something, sit there.

This is the most important leadership wisdom I can offer to all of you who lead ministries, committees, programs here at this church, and do service in our community. More important than any of the activity or meetings that you will run, more important than the work you do, and more important *to* the work you do is the time that you take to spend sitting at the feet of Jesus and listen to what he says, receiving the grace that he offers, enjoying the beauty of his words to you, and sharing in the abundance of his love with others. These are vastly more important than the work we can accomplish for him.

Have you ever been involved in a project, or worked on something, and at that time in your life, you felt like your tank was empty—your physical, emotional, spiritual tank? How effective of a teammate were you? How clearly did you function? How joyful were you in your work? We cannot serve the kingdom winsomely and creatively and effectively if we are serving from our own deficiency. Jesus doesn't need these kinds of followers.

I read a quote this week that I want to share with you. It's by a German theologian, by the name of Ernst Kasemann (I love that name, Kasemann). He says: "You do not live from your own powers or from what the earth offers you. By yourself you can only die. You live from the grace of the One who remains true to you as a parent to its child even when you run from him, substitute illusions for him, no longer allow him to be Lord alone, no longer allow his word alone to be the light on your dark paths, no longer allow his love alone to be the power that keeps you alive and wakens you each day to the praise of his glory." Faith means we entrust ourselves and all the world to our Creator and ground ourselves and all the world to his mercy.

The danger that we face if we try to serve Jesus under our own power is that we will begin to keep a ledger of how much we're doing around here for Jesus, and begin to compare it to what others are doing. And this is the very worst thing that could happen to us. If you need let go of something in

order to spend more time with Jesus and be refreshed and renewed by his Spirit, I hope you do it. I'm a little worried about what I'll find in my inbox tomorrow morning, but if you need to let go in order to be filled, that is a good thing.

What God doesn't need is a bunch of people who are busy doing church work, creating mental checklists, leveling accusations about how God doesn't seem to be paying attention to them because they don't feel anything in their service. And we don't need people who are becoming resentful of the tasks and turning into fussy joyless church workers. That's precisely what we don't need. Ultimately what would be a great thing for our church is to have as many of us as possible regularly sitting at the feet of Jesus in their own lives, listening to his word, being renewed by his spirit, and being filled with his manifold graces.

That's what living in the Kingdom of God will look like on a day-to-day level in this church. And I promise that if you decide to say to me, "Jonathan I need to let go of X because it's stealing my joy," I will say, "Praise God that you have chosen so wisely, go sit at Jesus' feet." My only request is that you will come back to me and tell me and tell us how Jesus is reshaping, reforming you for ministry in this church. That would be such a good thing!

How do you spend time with Jesus?

- Listening closely to his word.
- Spending time in prayer.
- Listening for his voice in quiet reflection and meditation.