

PROPER 11 C

Luke 10:38-42

Martha, Martha

“Martha, Martha, you are Worried and distracted about many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her.”

The disturbing thing about this story of Mary and Martha

is that Martha was doing the very thing that is commanded by Jesus.

She was pouring herself out in service.

At another time, Jesus describes just this kind of hospitality and service as a virtue of the Kingdom of heaven.

There must be something about Martha's service that is disordered.

We won't find that disorder on the surface of the story.

Martha is doing exactly what she's supposed to be doing.

She's playing the traditional part of women, serving.

It's her sister who should have been reproved.

She's the one acting out, and so Martha rightly asked Jesus

to get her sister to help. Everything looks right, but something is wrong.

It is possible to go through all of life this way.

It is possible to do things that look right on the surface,
but are deeply wrong underneath.

For instance, several years ago a wonderful movie

about a chess prodigy came out called ***Searching for Bobby Fischer***.

The prodigy's father supported his son with all his heart and soul.

No expense was too great, no sacrifice too painful

for the sake of his son's promising career.

Naturally, the whole thing unravels on the father.

It's become too serious, too intense.

The father is ambition drives all the joy out of the game.

Something good, the father's support for his son, has spoiled.

Let me give you another example.

This one is taken from a little book entitled

Disorder Loves: Healing the Seven Deadly Sins by Bill Stafford.

“Brian is a stockbroker.

Since his early 20s, his chief goal has been

to obtain complete financial independence by the time he is 40.

Brian is tough but discreet, careful about his dealings

with insider tips or with the IRS,

meticulous in research and preparation,

quick and ruthless in execution.

As a result, he has made a great deal of money for other people,

and is on the verge of making at least as much for himself.

It would not be fair to say that money is his whole life.

He can take vacations at times.

He enjoys his children when he sees them.

His divorce was a major setback

***because of the division of assets that followed,
but nothing distracts him for long from his passion.
He does not often think of death,
but he means his estate to be his memorial.”***

On the surface, Brian exemplifies many virtues.

He is industrious, dedicated, and honest.

He is the kind of guy we want managing our retirement funds.

Nevertheless, Brian's god is money.

He is being strangled by the deadly sin, of avarice.

Brian's good stewardship has spoiled.

Neither of these characters I have described are bad, immoral people.

On the surface, they are good people. So, what's the problem?

The problem is that their sights are set way too low.

Notice, the Gospel doesn't teach us that creation is evil.

There's nothing inherently evil with feeding your guests,
supporting your children, or being a faithful steward.

Idolatry isn't usually a blatant worship of pagan gods.

Idolatry is more often disordered love.

C.S. Lewis wrote: ***“There is but one good; That is God.***

Everything else is good when it looks to him

and bad when it turns from him.”

When good things become ends in and of themselves,

when they don't point toward God,
 when they aren't flavored through and through with the salt of heaven,
 they spoil.

Read this way, the story of Mary and Martha
 isn't so much a reflection on human temperament –
 we must have both contemplatives and workers.

This story comes on the heels of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

It is the other side of the coin that is the dual commandment,
 the summary of the law.

Mary exemplifies not a contemplative, but one who in this moment
 sets her sights on the one thing needful –
 to love the Lord your God with all the heart, soul, and mind.

This sentiment and hope is found in the wonderful hymn,

**“Be is thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
 all else be naught to me, save that the art –
 thou my best thought, by day or by night,
 waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.”**

This isn't a call to other-worldly asceticism.

This isn't a call to spend every waking moment in the Bible.

This is a call to a blessed, abundant life.

The hope of heaven isn't just a reward;

The hope of glory is the outcome of a life of discipleship.

Every aspect, every molecule of life
is to be suffused with the spirit of God.

Our thoughts and actions only can be good when they serve God.

If this truth were just a matter of having the right information,
more of us would be living it. But obviously, we aren't.

The whole reason we need Christ so desperately is that without him,
we lack the basic ability to serve God. God's grace reaches out to us
when we have it all wrong.

We can't even begin to get on the right path until we humble ourselves,
and admit that we are broken, sinful people.

We have no hope for maturing if we forget the grace by which we stand.

Let me finish by quoting Soren Kierkegaard who put it this way;

“Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing: FATHER IN HEAVEN!

What is man without Thee!

What is all that he knows, vast accumulation though it be,

but a chipped fragment if he does not know Thee!

What is all his striving, could it even encompass a world,

but a half-finished work if he does not know Thee:

Thee the One, who art one thing and who are art all!”

Amen.