

“Meet at His Feet”

Relationships – part #2

Luke 10:38-42

[1-title] *Welcome.*

Let’s pray. Thank you, O God, for your sustaining presence in our lives. Teach us this day to relax, to listen, and to choose to worship you. God, if there is someone here today who feels far from you, draw them closer. If there is someone struggling, provide them relief. Help us to know the presence of your Spirit, as we encounter Jesus today. We pray this in his name. Amen.

[2-stress] It is easy to worry when we shouldn’t. It is easy to get distracted and forget about the most important things. We’ve all lived there. We prepare for the worst, and then later feel silly for our fears. We waste our time running around like chickens with our heads cut off, when the most important thing for us to do is just show up. Just being there for someone is often all that is required.

[3-Calcutta] Pastor Lori Salerno told a story about working in Calcutta, India, with Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity. Salerno couldn’t believe how peacefully the nuns ministered in the slums, caring for people whom others had forgotten. But there was something she couldn’t understand, so she finally asked one of the sisters: “You pray five times a day! How do you get any of your work done?” The nun replied, “The greater mystery is, how do you get your work done without prayer?” It was a clash of cultures, and Salerno was deeply convicted. Instead of breaking the work to commune with God, the nuns taught her to live for communing with God, and break that communion to work.¹

[4-stress 2] Life is not easy. There are bills to pay. We have jobs to do, families to feed, even church to attend! These things all add to our stress. We live in a frantic culture. Everyone runs around trying to squeeze the most out of life, trying get “the biggest bang for their buck.”

I’m not saying that we should be sloths. There is work to be done. I know that. As a teenager, I used to get up early to clean dog kennels before school. However, my parents also taught me about rest and grace. If I was sick or

¹ Lori Salerno, Youth Worker’s National Convention, Nashville, TN, 2005.

overloaded, I could ask my dad occasionally if it would be ok if he cleaned them for me. The answer was always, “Yes.”

[5-scripture] The Bible makes it clear that we should not worry. Jesus says in Matthew 6:25, “...Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.” He also says in Matthew 6:33-34, “...Seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” If we keep our priorities straight, we will save ourselves needless anxiety.

[6-Jesus and Mary] That’s what this story in Luke 10 is all about: priorities. It is not about who was right and who was wrong. Martha and Mary both wanted the best for Jesus. No one was asked to do anything specific. Each woman made a choice. Martha chose to prepare the meal. Mary chose to sit and listen at the feet of Jesus.

[7-Martha working] It is important to remember that hospitality was critical in biblical times. Martha was, in fact, following the rules of hospitality. Put yourself in her shoes. Jesus wasn’t just a famous visiting rabbi; Jesus was also her close, personal friend. John 11:5 says, “...Jesus loved Martha and her sister and [their brother] Lazarus.” Martha might not have even known that Jesus was coming to visit. Obviously, Martha wanted to give her best for Jesus. No one seems to have criticized her for making the meal.

[8-Mary] Yet, in contrast, the scripture says Mary spent time with Jesus, sitting at his feet. We know that time is precious. Mary simply wanted to be with Jesus, listening. Mary acted like a disciple. In Jesus’ time, rabbis taught while their students sat at their feet and listened.

Who loves a good story? We all do. I would love to actually sit at Jesus’ feet and let him tell me about the miracles he performed and his conflicts with the religious leaders. I’d listen to Jesus talk about God’s love. We’d laugh at all the silliness of traveling with twelve disciples. They must have told crazy stories about each other! Mary and Jesus enjoyed sharing this moment together.

[9-Martha] However, Martha’s nerves got the best of her. Martha stormed out of the kitchen and said something like, “Well, Jesus, I wish we all had time to

sit around doing nothing, but if we are going to eat anything tonight, someone has to get dinner going. Tell my sister to get off her lazy bum and help me!”

Seems like a typical sister-squabble. Why did Martha react that way? Maybe it was jealousy, as in, “I want my sister to be by me, not you, Jesus.” If anything, Martha’s words were a little insulting. She talked over Mary. Apparently, Martha momentarily forgot the finer points of hospitality.

I don’t blame her. If Jesus showed up unexpectedly at your house, what would you do? I’d frantically throw the dirty laundry in a closet, apologize profusely as I wiped dust off the counter, move some books and papers, and try to make a place for Jesus to sit. And what would Jesus say? “It’s fine. I’m so glad just to see you.”

Martha was angry because she was not willing to see how much Mary enjoyed Jesus. I bet Martha felt foolish, regretting that she hadn’t stopped to sit at Jesus’ feet, too. She was doing too much, instead of doing what was necessary.

[10-Jesus] I love that Jesus didn’t reprimand her. He gave her a loving look. He said her name, twice, with emotion. “Martha, Martha, you are worried about much, when only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better thing, and it won’t be taken from her.” (Luke 10:41-42) My guess is that after Jesus said this, the mood improved, and Martha sat at Jesus’ feet for a while, and then both women helped set the table.

[11-Prayer] The crux of this story is clear to me. We must pray like Mary first, so that we can then do the work of Martha.

If there is anything we Christians are guilty of, it is that we are too busy to pray. What are we really saying? That we are too busy to spend time with Jesus.

Remember, Jesus promises to take care of us. (Matthew 6:32.) Yet we act like we can handle everything on our own. By our busy-ness and neglect of prayer, we effectively say to God, “Stay out of my way, Lord; I got this.”

[12-Good morning] We have a refrigerator magnet that says: “Good morning! This is God. I will be handling all of your problems today. I will not need your help. So relax and have a great day.” Do you know what happens when we relax, when we rest? The day is easier to handle. That’s why God made it a law to take a Sabbath rest. (Exodus 20:8-11) Otherwise, we would become slaves to our work.

The place to rest is sitting at Jesus’ feet. Sitting down literally relaxes your feet, taking pressure off of them. Every square inch of your feet is carrying around three to five pounds of pressure when you stand. When you rest, when you sit down, that pressure is zero.

[13-Psalm 27:4] Choosing to relax at Jesus’ feet probably won’t happen overnight. Even if we recognize our need to relax, we won’t go from 6th gear to neutral all at once. What we need to do is follow Mary’s example. Just do the one thing required. As Psalm 27:4 says, “One thing I have asked of the LORD, this is what I desire: to dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and seek Him in His temple.”

Mary made a choice. That choice can be ours. If we pray like Mary first, we will be ready to work like Martha.

I’d like to end this message with time of confession. Let’s read together.
Prayer of Confession: (by Nancy C. Townley, Ministry Matters)

[14-16-responsive reading] Patient Lord, we schedule our lives down to the very second. We crowd in as much activity as we can and then wonder why we are so stressed out and tired. We are afraid to miss out on anything. And when it comes time to be with others, we spend our time worrying about details rather than longing for the visit.

Forgive us when we get so caught up in the details and miss the opportunity to sit at your feet, learning, listening, growing in our faith. Help us to place ourselves in your care. Slow us down, just a bit, so that we can see the wonders you have placed before us and truly enjoy and share the blessings you have given to us. For we ask this in Jesus’ Name. Amen.

[17] Words of Assurance: (by Nancy C. Townley, Ministry Matters)

On the seventh day of creation, God rested, creating a Sabbath, a time set apart for rest, to learn, to listen, to be quiet and at peace. Let Sabbath take root in your heart and in your life. Be at peace in God’s love for you.

Let’s pray.

Pastoral Prayer: (by Nancy C. Townley, Ministry Matters)

Lord, it is easy for us to sit here, listening to the Gospel story of Martha’s hard work and Mary’s abandonment so that she could sit and listen to Jesus. We know what it’s like to try to get a house ready for company. We want everything

to be just right and pleasant. We worry about so many details and seem to tie ourselves in knots.

Martha claims our sympathy. She’s the one doing the majority of the work, so we think. She needs some help, and there is her sister Mary, who is sitting and listening to Jesus when she should be helping. Martha is angry, frustrated, and exhausted. Martha has not found sanctuary but rather slavery. She is a slave to her fears of not having everything done, of not being the good hostess, of feeling that the responsibility for everything rests on her shoulders.

We would want Mary to get up and help, but Jesus offers Martha and us a reminder of what is important. He has come to see them, not to inspect the house and judge the hospitality. He has come to share the good news of hope and love.

We need to take some time to listen to that news and to fully feel it penetrate our souls, flooding out the pressures and fears. Today we are encouraged to take this time, to breathe deeply of God’s loving spirit. Help us to be open to including Sabbath as a strong part of our lives. For we ask this in Jesus’ Name. Amen. *(continue with the Prayers of the People and the Lord’s Prayer)*
Memory Verse: Luke 9:35 (NIV) - *A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”*

Reflection Questions:

1. On a scale of 1-10, how do you rate yourself on scheduling your priorities?
2. In the course of a normal day, do you generally feel stressed or relaxed? Why?
3. What did Mary need from Jesus? What did she find at his feet?
4. What advice would you give Martha? Does that advice apply to yourself?
5. How can you take the time to “sit at Jesus’ feet” this week? How can you help someone else do the same?