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*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts
be acceptable in you sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. AMEN.*

I simply love this Gospel passage from Luke. I suppose I love this lesson so much because it is so real. Every one of us can put ourselves into the story. At one time or another, we have been stuck doing most of the chores while someone else gets to reap the benefits of entertaining the honored guest. And at one time or another, we have been so privileged as to sit down beside someone special and listen to every word that comes forth from their mouth while someone else does the dirty work to make the event possible. We either side with Martha, hoping Jesus will indeed tell Mary to go help her in the kitchen with the chores, or we give accolades to Mary for choosing the better part.

We all have way too much to do. We fill our time and our calendars with activity after activity, moving ourselves toward burnout very quickly. Jesus comes to tell us to let go of all of those things and to just be still and know that God is God. Take a breather and listen for the Word of the Lord. This is all well and good. We do get distracted by our many activities and often forget that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

But I've been asking myself a different question about the passage this week. Instead of Martha asking Jesus to chastise her sister for not helping out in the kitchen, what would have happened if Mary asked the question? "Jesus, don't you care that Martha is so busy in the kitchen that she doesn't hear a word you are saying? Go tell her to sit down and listen!" I wonder how Jesus would have replied. I wonder if he would have said, "Mary, Mary, you are worried and distracted by other people; there is need of only one thing. Martha has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her!"

This may be a little far-fetched, but I think it is a legitimate question. As you know, I'm a pretty good Martha. I love to *do* things. I love to *accomplish* things. I currently have 4 ongoing to-do lists and one of them has a sub-list, and I'm pretty proud of that. I love to serve and to help people. I've finally decided that *doing* is one of my gifts that God has given me. I believe that Jesus has called me to claim my gifts and use for the good of the kingdom. I believe Martha's ministry was blessed, and in the gospel of John, she confesses that Jesus is Lord.

At the same time, I know that just *doing* will not get any of us into the kingdom of heaven. It turns out that Jesus is all about relationships, and Mary knew that well. She loved to listen and was okay if the turkey got a little bit cold, and she liked eating off of paper plates just fine. She went about her ministry in a different way, and I believe that her ministry was blessed just the same.

Because I think that the ministries of Martha and Mary were blessed, I don't see how Jesus could have been criticizing Martha for her serving. Rather I think Martha needed to learn that timing is everything and this time, she got it wrong. This was not a day to have a 7 course dinner party with china and silver. This was a time to order out for *pizza*. Jesus had already set his face toward Jerusalem. He knew his fate was determined. He was going to die. And so he wanted to spend as much time with his close family as possible. And as far as we can tell, Mary and Martha were two of his favorite people. Their house felt like his home, and Jesus just wanted

to let his hair down and spend some quality time with the people he loved. No, Martha, this was *not* a time to try out a new recipe to impress the guests. This was *not* a time to have to wait on the bread to rise or grind the matzo or to filet the fish. This was a time to pick up some rotisserie chicken from the deli, a bag of salad, a tub of potato salad and a box of ice cream sandwiches.

Now I'm all about radical hospitality, and that theme is crucial to my personal theology and understanding of evangelism and church growth. But Martha, you need to learn that *timing is everything*. If you don't figure that out soon, you might just miss a miracle right in front of your very eyes.

Oh, there's one more thing Martha, you better be careful about your criticism, and if you're going to complain and triangulate, Jesus is probably *not* the one to talk to. I believe Jesus would have been upset with *Mary* if *she* had criticized Martha's work in the kitchen. I think that's a lesson that Jesus is trying to get across to us here. Jesus has called each and every one of us to a ministry within the church. Each of our calls is unique, and each is blessed by God. Our task is to live into that call, and not to criticize the way our neighbor lives out their call.

We must then learn how to be content with those calls. In learning to accept our calls, we also struggle to let other people live into their calls, even if they may conflict with our own. Now that is hard work, because like Martha, we will want others to come and help us with our jobs. Sometimes that is necessary and appropriate, but at other times, it can become a cover up.

It seems to me that when we are focusing on what others are doing or not doing, we probably need to go and look in the mirror. Remember that verse about how it's easier to point out the speck in someone else's eye than to realize we have a log in our own? Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. It may be that we are really discontent with our own work, and not with someone else's. Maybe *this* is what Jesus is trying to tell Martha.

Maybe Jesus is saying to Martha that she is free to make up her own mind. Maybe Jesus is saying that contrary to the laws of the time and the expectations of her culture, she really can choose a different life-giving work. If and when we really love what we are doing, we won't be focusing on what our neighbors are doing. If and when we give ourselves over fully to the work that our relationship with Jesus calls us to do, then we will find true joy. We won't criticize the work of others or chastise them for not helping us. Rather we will love them in Christian community and help them discern their own calls to ministry, in whatever form that it may be revealed.

Our relationship with Jesus Christ in community gives us freedom to follow our call. The Holy Spirit gives us gifts to be Mary, or Martha, or Stewart, or Sarah or Grey or Tim or Colleen or Don or Lee or Benjamin or William or the newest member of the household of God whom we welcome today, Henry Thomas. Those gifts are as varied as our names and our backgrounds. Our task is to always recognize the presence of the Holy One in our midst and especially in one another, no matter what our call and no matter what our vocation. Amen.