

## Are You a Mary or a Martha?

(Luke 10:38-42)

Sermon delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia  
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 21, 2019

In the name of the one God: creator; redeemer; and sustainer. Amen.

As I begin this morning, I would like to share three quotes with you ... quotes from different individuals who lived at various points in the past two centuries. In their own way each will play into the point I will be making in my homily. The first comes from Lee Iacocca, the legendary chairman of Chrysler, who once said, "In times of great stress or adversity, it's always best to keep busy, to plow your anger and your energy into something positive."<sup>1</sup> The famous writer and lecturer Dale Carnegie said, "Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy."<sup>2</sup> And 19<sup>th</sup> century suffragist and social activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote, "I am always busy, which is perhaps the chief reason why I am always well."<sup>3</sup>

Activity as a way of dealing with stress. Activity as a way of overcoming fear. Activity as a way of maintaining health. What do these three particular quotes tell me? In short, they tell me that we live in a world that is driven ***by the busy***. And as the words of these three individuals show, this is not a point that we reached in just the recent past. When you consider how far back these quotes date, you can see that ... at least in the words of Stanton, Carnegie and Iacocca ... the journey to this point was launched quite a while back. And each of them, in both the times in which they were spoken and in the time in which we now live, is a sign of "the norm of a culture that values productivity and busyness over reflection and listening."<sup>4</sup> They are emblematic of society having arrived at a point in our history where ***doing*** is more valued and prioritized more than simply ***being***.

And it is that dichotomy ... the divide between ***being busy*** and ***being still*** ... that we find in the brief reading from Luke's Gospel. Mary and Martha have vastly different approaches to making use of the time they have with Jesus. One sister opts to do the scurrying about and then complain about the choice she has made; the other takes advantage of the time to sit and learn from their friend and teacher and simply rejoice in his presence.

Mary ***seized*** the opportunity; Martha let the opportunity ***pass her by***. And when Jesus gently called out Martha on her complaining, he was reminding her of what in ***that moment*** was more important. It was not work, or scurrying around to accomplish something, or checking off items on a list. No, what was most important was the choice Mary had made to simply ***sit*** ... and ***be***.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/busy>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Miller Brueggemann, "Luke 10:38-42 – A Pastoral Perspective." *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke, Vol. I* (Kindle edition).

How often in our own lives do we focus so much on the business of life ... the **busyness** of life ... that we do not make room for Jesus? When we are so busy with the tasks of each day that nothing else has room to breathe, do we ever stop to consider that we also are crowding out God? There are likely many reasons why being busy is for people preferable to being silent. Perhaps their personalities are such that they do not know **how** to slow down. Maybe there is uncertainty that they will not know what to do in the moments of just **being**.

And I wonder whether for some there is simply fear over what they will hear from God in those moments of non-activity. What will God ask of them?

This interaction between Jesus, Mary and Martha should be a place of reassurance. Not once do we see that Jesus has asked **anything** of them. By doing nothing more than sitting with him, Mary has allowed space for God to work ... space for Jesus to spend time with her, talk with her and share God's love with her.

This morning, I would like for each of you to have a Mary moment.

I would like to invite you for the next few minutes to sit in silence. I want you to try to set aside any of the lists or tasks or activities that you may be thinking about. I want you to step out of the liturgy briefly, setting aside your bulletin, prayer book and hymnal. I want you to move away from rushing around with Martha and spend time sitting with Jesus. Pay attention to what you may feel ... or what you think you are missing. See how it feels to focus on **being** rather than **doing**. In the space that you are creating, pay attention to what you may hear from God.

And as you leave this place and move into the remainder of your day, may you take a bit of this Mary time into a world that far too often runs like Martha.

[two minutes of silence]

Amen.