

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 10:38–42

Sermon: “Appointed Time”

During this season of Pentecost, we focus on the Christian life and on this Sunday as with all Sundays we gather around the Word of God to hear, listen and meditate on it as the only priority. This is the **appointed time** each week that we do this.

Are you familiar with the meaning of “times appointed”? Maybe not, yet we all live with “times appointed” every day. If you punch a time card as you begin work and end work, you know “times appointed.” Or if you visit a doctor or dentist, you know the importance of “times appointed.” And if you want to eat lunch or dinner, you know about “times appointed” for those meals. Miss them, and you just may go hungry!

The connection of that phrase to the Gospel for this day comes from the Lutheran Confessions. In the Large Catechism, as Luther explicates the Third Commandment, he says: “we must know that God insists upon a strict observance of this commandment and will punish all who despise His Word and are not willing to hear and learn it, especially at the *time appointed* for the purpose” (LC I 95).

It helps to keep this in mind as we look into the story of Martha and Mary and their reaction to the arrival of Jesus in their midst. It’s obvious both loved him and wanted to be with him. One understood the nature of the “appointed time” with Jesus; the other needed to be taught and guided to understand the importance of the moment, the appointed time.

Jesus was in their home, as the very Son of God, and he came to serve them. It was the “appointed time” for him to speak the Word into their ears and for them to listen, to hear it, learn it, believe it, and receive heavenly treasures from God’s own Son. When that happens for them, and for us today, the Lord Jesus urges us: at the times appointed, choose the one thing necessary and be richly blessed with eternal treasures! A few weeks ago I talked about doing first things first this applies to our faith life too.

The story of Martha and Mary starts out so wonderfully. Martha opens her home to Jesus as he travels by and through her village. Her sister, Mary, is also present and spends time with Jesus at the house. The Lord has stopped in and will stay for a meal. Nothing could be better.

But now, both sisters face a choice as to how they'll spend that time with Jesus. Martha hustles and bustles in the kitchen, arranging pots, pans, firing up the stove. Her time is devoted to preparing the table, the food, or the "many things" necessary to serve Jesus. It's possible that some of the other disciples were there and hungry also. Thus, her main priority when Jesus visits is preparation for serving a meal. We've all done that at times.

Mary, on the other hand, just sits, nestles in comfortably at the feet of Jesus. She is a humble learner, listening to every word Jesus speaks. Remember at the time it would be very rare that any rabbi would even speak to a woman, but Jesus is no ordinary rabbi. He shares the Gospel teaching the things of God to all who would listen.

To some Mary's choice appears self-centered as it did to Martha, it seems so inappropriate that she can't contain herself. She finally blurts out, **"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me"** (v 40). Frustrated, tugged back and forth, Martha has to get it off her chest: "Lord, make this sister of mine make the right choice—to get out here and help me!"

Poor Martha had forgotten why Jesus had come to her house, not to be served, but to serve, to share and teach. **"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her"** (vs 41–42). This is the time appointed for Martha and Mary to hear Jesus, to listen to his Word, and nothing is more important. That Word is the one necessary thing at this moment.

Jesus entered this house, first and foremost, to carry out his ministry, to proclaim, to teach, to make known the heavenly Father, to reveal God's mercy and forgiveness. At this house he is there to bring Martha and Mary these heavenly treasures. And no doubt to tell them what lay ahead for himself—his very own suffering and death for the forgiveness of sins and resurrection to heavenly glory. Instead, Martha chose to concern herself with many things, not the one thing necessary at the appointed time while Jesus is present.

Second, these many things were not evil or harmful, at least not in and of themselves. Martha believed preparations are important, and these were people had to eat, didn't they? Martha did care, did attend Jesus, welcome him, lovingly prepare to serve him a meal. Who could ask for anything more?

Yet, at this time, her hustle and bustle was not the best choice **“at the appointed time.”** The Holy Spirit points to the underlying problem here: **“But Martha was distracted with much serving”** (v 40). This led to her accusing comments that Jesus didn’t care and giving credence to what Luther also said regarding the Third Commandment: **“Where the heart is idle and the Word does not make a sound, the devil breaks in and has done the damage before we are aware”** (LC I 100). Jesus lovingly identifies that danger by saying, **“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things”** (v 41). However, the danger for Martha is real, that Satan might have his way with her and the worries of this world may choke out the Word (cf. 8:14).

At times appointed for the hearing of God's Word, at times appointed to focus on Jesus, the living Word, distractions, worldly worries, even trying to do something ourselves for the Lord, distracts from the one necessary thing, receiving the Word for our benefit, as Luther reminds us: **"Whenever God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or meditated upon, then the person, day, and work are sanctified. This is not because of the outward work, but because of the Word, which makes saints of us all"** (LC I 92). At those times appointed, the Word alone brings great treasure and blessings.

Jesus gathers Martha in to the moment, the appointed time for listening, receiving, believing. It's as if he says, "My dear, dear woman, whom I love, listen to my words and understand the appointed time. I am here for you right now. Listen to me and receive food for your soul, the treasures of heaven.

“Yes, those other things, the many preparations, are important and do serve me when the time is right. But this is the time appointed for listening, hearing, believing, receiving, being fed. One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her (v 42). Come yourself for this one thing, this food, the bread of life, which gives you lasting, eternal treasures, offers forgiveness of sins, and provides the certainty of life everlasting.”

Jesus often attached great promises to the Word as the source of great blessings: **“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you”** (John 15:3). **“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you”** (15:7). And finally: **“Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit”** (15:5).

Jesus not only intended those promises for you and for me today, but for Martha. Soon he would complete his way to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), there to suffer, die, and rise again as he said. By his own death on the cross, he defeats death; by shedding his own blood, he cleanses us from all sin and blots out every transgression; by his own resurrection, it is declared that God has accepted this sacrifice for sin; by that resurrection from the dead, Jesus becomes the firstfruits of all those raised on the Last Day to join him in heaven.

How can anything, or many things, be more important than hearing that Gospel? How can we neglect such eternal blessings by being pulled away, distracted, by anything else when Christ himself is present in that Word to bless, strengthen, and sustain us for life everlasting?

At such times appointed for hearing that Word, choose the one necessary thing! Hear the Word of God spoken to you: the Good News of God's forgiveness is for you and for your comfort. These are the treasures that last forever and will not be taken from you when you remain in his Word.

It's said that a cathedral in Milan, Italy, has three inscriptions etched into respective doorways. Over the right-hand door is inscribed "All that pleases is but for a moment." Over the left-hand door one reads "All that troubles is but for a moment." But over the center door is etched "Nothing is important save that which is eternal." Martha had forgotten that truth on the day when Jesus came into her home.

Jesus tenderly and lovingly brings her back to the one necessary thing, sitting at his feet, listening to the Word, the Gospel, the Good News, through which she is blessed with forgiveness of sins and renewed faith and is kept in the faith for life everlasting.

At those appointed times, when the Word is spoken for you, whether in a worship setting or home devotions or by a fellow believer, choose the one necessary thing. Humbly sit at his feet and listen; receive the riches and treasures of heaven, which will not be taken from you. Jesus promised: ***“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God”*** (Luke 11:28a).

Amen