

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 10:38–42

Sermon: "Being Blessed, Being a Blessing"

Jesus comes to Bethany. He comes as Divine Visitor. He comes that the Word have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people. He comes to the home of Martha, where it appears that there are only two holy people to hear the preaching of Jesus, Martha and her sister, Mary.

No megachurch here, for Bethany is just a little village tucked away in the hills by the Mount of Olives. Divine Visitor Jesus visits in order to build up the muscle and brawn of faith already gifted to Martha and Mary. He comes that Martha and Mary “*not shift from the hope of the gospel*” (Col 1:23) that they have heard and believed. Both sisters needed the strengthening of the Gospel that would pour from the mouth of this Divine Visitor. So, to both these two sisters, Jesus comes bringing Holy Hospitality.

However, this day only Mary is receiving the strengthening. She sits. She listens. She wants instruction. She is like those commended by Peter: ***“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation”*** (1 Peter 2:2). Sister Martha is occupied with her serving. Her fretting. Her fussing. Her doing. She is like the one of which Jesus warns, ***“Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”*** (Matthew 6:25).

Sister Martha is known from three places in Scripture. We know her from this text where she worries about serving. We also know her in John 11. She meets Jesus on the Bethany road, wondering why he didn't arrive sooner to stave off the death of her brother Lazarus. Jesus preaches. He brings to her the hope of the Gospel, to which Martha makes confession of the resurrection of her dead brother because Jesus is the Christ (John 11:24, 27).

Finally, just six days before Jesus' crucifixion, she will serve a Sabbath meal to Jesus in her home (John 12:2).

Sister Mary is also known by the same three scriptural markers. We know her from this text in which she sits at the feet of Jesus, seeking his face and his words. She also is part of the John 11 narrative, mourning over the death of her brother and meeting Jesus on the Bethany road. She wonders, too, as did her sister Martha, ***“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”*** (John 11:32).

Finally, she, too, is present at that final Sabbath meal of Jesus before his death. She anoints his feet with costly oil, picturing just how true are the words of the prophet Isaiah (52:7), that the feet of him who brings good news and publishes peace are indeed most beautiful—even as they are soon to be pierced and dripping with blood.

Yes, we can chastise and commend both Martha and Mary. Sinful saints they are. And for such came Jesus, preaching, teaching, catechizing. The one thing necessary is always the Word of our Lord. The Word is always good and ready to give us Jesus and his words. A word of warning for anyone hostile in mind and doing evil deeds. A word of security for those needing strengthening in the battle against sin, their flesh, and the devil.

What exactly was the wisdom Mary was hearing and receiving from the words of Jesus? Words of her Lord's death? Perhaps. Words of her Lord's resurrection? Perhaps. Augustine also speculated:

What was Mary enjoying while she was listening? What was she eating? What was she drinking? Do you know? Let's ask the Lord, who keeps such a splendid table for his own people, let's ask him. "Blessed," he says, "are those who are hungry and thirst for justice, because they shall be satisfied." It was from this wellspring, from this storehouse of justice, that Mary, seated at

the Lord's feet, was in her hunger receiving crumbs. I will venture to say that she was eating the one she was listening to. He was being eaten, because he was the Bread. "I" he said, "am the bread who came down from heaven." (Arthur A. Just Jr., ed., New Testament III: Luke, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003], 182)

Whatever Mary heard and ate, it was the one necessary thing, the one necessary food. It was Jesus revealing the riches of the glory of the mystery of God. Such a mystery, men of long ago waited to hear, but didn't hear. Such a mystery, men of long ago waited to see, but did not see.

Now, in the very house of Martha, sat the knowledge, wisdom, and mystery of God in the flesh, the fleshly God who would take away the curse of the Law by his death. All the ordinances of the Law that we fought against—the "do this" and the "don't do that"—he took them to the cross, nailing them there.

This was how God handled our sin. His Son on the cross. His blood bringing our forgiveness.

For three days, Jerusalem was in a tizzy over the cross. Some Jews were relieved. Jesus was crucified. He was out of the way. Arch Enemy Number One had been eliminated. Other Jews were nervous. He said he would rise again. Would some of his followers steal his body? Some Jews were sad. Jesus was dead. He was gone. He was to have been the one to defeat the Romans, to lead Israel to glory and to exhibit to the world a real king. Now what?

The Third Day is what! The outcome is not in doubt. Christ brings the justification of our sin by his resurrection. Mankind is vindicated. Sin has been atoned, paid for. The devil is crushed, and we are reconciled to the Father. The greater Jonah has been spat out from the heart of the earth, and the greater Isaac laughs at Satan in hell because even death could not hold him.

Jesus crucified and resurrected. This is the one thing necessary that always needs to be preached, because our attention can be so easily diverted away from Jesus. Perhaps our attention is on our work. Do I have enough food? Do I have the right wine for the occasion? Are the napkins folded correctly? Perhaps our attention is on another person. A sister. A father. A mother. A son. Jesus slashes human ambition, glory, and pride with these words, ***“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”*** (Matthew 20:28).

Our Savior, the Divine Visitor, serves us today. We desire to be in his house because he has given us faith to seek his face. ***“One thing have I asked of the Lord,” David writes in our psalm, “that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple”*** (Psalm 27:4).

We hear his Word because he has given us faith that hungers for glad tidings. We taste him in the Sacrament because he has given us faith to eat and drink often at his holy table. God serving man. That's what happens in worship. God serves man. The Lord speaks, we listen. The Lord gives, we receive.

Such scenarios were repeated time and time again after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

There's Philip. He's leaving Jerusalem and going to a city of Samaria. He's proclaiming Christ. Multitudes are hearing and giving heed with much joy (Acts 8:5–8).

There's Saul. He's at Damascus. It's rumored that he's there to arrest those who call on Jesus' name. But look. He's in the synagogue proclaiming Jesus! Many are hearing that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 9:20–22).

There's Peter. He's in the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. He is asked to speak all that has been commanded him by the Lord (Acts 10:33).

There's the duo of Barnabas and Paul at Antioch. They preach to Jew and Gentile. Some of the Jewish hearers urge them to continue in the grace of God, and some of the Gentile hearers are glad and glorify the Word of God (Acts 13:42, 48).

The scenes have come and gone. Places and people have changed. Chalcedon and Cyprian. Italy and Irenaeus. Leipzig and Luther. More will come. Other teachers and hearers. Those who expound and those who hear. Those who teach and those who are taught. The subject matter is Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins. It's God's love for the world in the Man Jesus Christ. It's God's acting and the human race receiving. God serves us. Faith comes by hearing, hearing the Word of God.

We are strengthened by his Word, as was Mary. It's a holy hospitality to us. We sit. We listen. We pray. "Let Your Word not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people," as we hear in the Divine Service. In Jesus' name. Amen