

Sermon Draft for July 20. 2025

Text: Luke 10:38–42

Sermon: “What’s Important?”

In the two incidents that precede today’s Gospel, Jesus teaches that the most important thing is to receive his merciful service. To the joyful 72, back from their successful mission work (Luke 10:17–20), Jesus agrees that their work was blessed by his powerful Word. But he warns them not to rejoice in the success of their endeavor, rather in his work for them, ***“that your names are written in heaven.”*** To the man who ***“wanted to justify himself”*** (Luke 10:29–37), Jesus teaches that the most important thing is to receive the ministry of mercy he came to bring us who have been robbed and beaten by Satan.

Our Psalm wonderfully reflects the theme of the day. David expresses his understanding of our relationship with God. Above all we need God and God’s service to us. The “one thing” David seeks is to live in the Lord’s gracious presence.

In the Old Testament Reading Abraham maintains a proper balance between being served by the Lord and serving him. After Abraham receives the sign of God's gracious covenant and the promise of Isaac (Genesis 17:21), the Lord appears to him (v 1) as the presence of the "three men" (v 2). Abraham delights in their presence and gladly offers them hospitality.

There are many fairy tales in which someone is granted three wishes. These fictional stories challenge our imaginations: "What would I choose?" In Psalm 27, King David gives his one and only wish: ***"One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: 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 seek him in his temple"*** (Psalm 27:4). David wanted above all things to be in the Lord's forgiving, gracious presence. What's your one thing? In today's Gospel Jesus tells us that the thing for us, above all things, is to listen to him and receive his life-giving service.

Some would try to convince us that there is a time when we can move beyond being forgiven and receiving our Lord's service. But just as a branch must always receive nourishment from the vine or die, no matter how green or full of life it appears to be (John 15:4–7) so listening to Jesus, receiving his service, is the one thing above all things.

Martha's many things brought worry. Her many things were in and of themselves good things: welcoming Jesus, providing hospitality, and serving a meal. Jesus in sending the 72 taught that they were to go where they were welcomed and listened to (Luke 10:5–12, 16). Martha is welcoming Jesus. But even good things choke off the work of God's Word (Luke 8:14). Martha's wrong priorities caused her to be self-righteous toward her sister and to miss the very presence of Jesus. Martha forgot who the real Servant is. She thought she was the host and Jesus was the guest.

Earlier in Luke 10 Jesus warned the joyful 72 returning from their successful mission not to rejoice in their seeming success, but in the most important thing that their names were written in heaven they were served by Jesus' saving work.

When we are concerned about how others aren't thankful or helpful enough, when we're grumbling and complaining, dragging ourselves around, these are signs that we're not letting Jesus serve us first.

Tim Heiney, an LCMS missionary in Guinea, observed during a furlough that life seems so much busier here. We seem to be rushing to so many things. It seems people even rush to vacations and weekend retreats. Some even boast of how busy they are.

Mary's one thing brought eternal blessings. To the world Mary may look lazy. But passively sitting at Jesus' feet and listening is the best thing (v 42a).

The Old Testament commandment to rest on the Sabbath was given by God in order that his people would remember who is the first servant: God, the Creator (Exodus 20:11) and Deliverer (Deuteronomy 5:15).

“It will not be taken from her” (v 42b). Contrast this beautiful promise of our Lord with the word snatched by Satan (Luke 8:5, 12) and the word choked by worries (Luke 8:7, 14) from his parable of the sower and the seed. The one thing always for us is Jesus the Servant.

Jesus is here to serve us in his sacred Word, Holy Baptism, and the Sacrament of the Altar. ***“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”*** (Matthew 20:28).

Our hymnal follows the Eastern and German tradition of calling the Communion service the “Divine Service.” The point is that worship is first and foremost God’s service to us. Going to church isn’t doing God a favor.

We go to receive the fruit of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation. Sure, we respond to his grace and forgiveness by confessing and praising his name and serving our neighbor, but first things first.

Unless we passively sit at Jesus' feet and listen, let him wash us in Holy Baptism, let him take our sins away and give us his perfect righteousness, let him put his holy body and precious blood into our mouths, we are not his.

In our Old Testament Reading: Abraham recognizes the best thing is to be in the Lord's presence, and he continues to receive the Lord's blessing in the more detailed promise of Isaac's coming. Peter's mother-in-law got it right: she was served by Jesus first (as he healed her), then she served (Luke 4:38–39). Later, after Lazarus' resurrection, Martha also got it right. First Jesus taught her and raised her brother. Then she served a dinner (John 12:1–2). So, what is your one thing that is important?

A television special showed how skiers who were blind were trained for slalom skiing, impossible as that sounds. Paired with a sighted skier the skier who is blind is taught on the flat how to make left and right turns. When that is mastered, they go to a slalom course, where a sighted skier skies next to a blind skier. The sighted skier acts as a guide by verbal shouts, “Left!” “Right!” As the skier obeys the commands, he can negotiate the course and cross the finish line. It is either complete trust and obedience or catastrophe. Since we are spiritually blind by nature, we need to rely on a sighted guide to direct us on the course. God gives us the directions in his Word.

What a blessed way to begin a week! To be here, sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to his Word, receiving his forgiveness and peace, and gathered at the Table, where Jesus is host and distributes the holy meal he has prepared for us, “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

In Jesus precious name. Amen