

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Luke 10:38-42

"A Tale of Two Sisters"

BIBLICAL STUDY

Many of you know that we unveiled our new vision and mission statements last month. I would like us to look at them again. Note that they are now in our bulletins on the same page as the parish life.

Our Vision – *to see lives transformed through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Our Mission – *to share Christ's love and His Word with our community and the world through Christ-centered outreach, worship, prayer and biblical study.*

Notice the emphasis on Christ and His Word. Notice also the importance we place on Biblical Study. All of us are called to study and know God's Word. But how do we do that? Do we just read it and hope that some of it sticks or resonates with us? Do we read it here and there – when we feel down or when we feel good? The truth is we are to be students of the Word, and we are to engage it intellectually but also spiritually and when we do so with humility.

Over the last year I have preached lengthy series - one on Hebrews and another on *Why I Believe* as well as a few short two-part series. What I would like to do in the coming months is to preach on one of the specific Scriptures appointed for the day and do it in a way that unpacks their meaning as if one was to go about it as an inductive bible study.

Now what is inductive Bible Study? Inductive Bible Study is to study the Scriptures in such a way that you understand the meaning of the passage and how it applies to our daily lives. There are three steps to this process: Observation – What does the passage say? Interpretation – What does the passage mean? And then finally Application – How does it apply to my life?

MARTHA AND MARY

Now in today's Gospel reading from **Luke 10:38-42**, we have one of the most practical and insightful accounts found in all of Holy Scripture. We have the story of Martha and Mary and what happened when Jesus came to visit them. Let's look at it again:

"Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

So what do we observe from this passage? It is in Luke's Gospel and it is not repeated anywhere else. It is the first of three times we will find Martha and Mary mentioned in the Gospels. The other two

times are in **John 11** when Jesus hears that Martha and Mary’s brother Lazarus has died and then in **John 12** when Jesus goes again to see Martha and Mary and Lazarus for a festive dinner after Lazarus had been raised.

Our gospel passage for today is found at the end of Luke 10, and there is a purpose for its placement. For in the first part of Luke 10 there is the sending out of seventy disciples by Jesus. This is different than the sending out of the Twelve in Luke 9 and could very well be associated with the seventy nations listed in Genesis 10. Since Luke’s Gospel was written to Gentiles, he probably included this event to highlight the universality of the Gospel – in other words it was not just for Jews. So these seventy were sent out to represent Christ – they were ambassadors for Christ. Then Luke includes the parable of the Good Samaritan. We are to imitate Christ in showing Christ-like love to all. We are to assist in meeting the physical needs of our neighbors and that means everyone! There is no room for prejudice or bigotry in the Christian life.

SPENDING TIME WITH JESUS IS MOST IMPORTANT

But now we come to the last passage of Luke 10. The focus is not on the work of ministry – whether it be sharing the Gospel or meeting the needs of others; rather, the focus is on that which is to be most important in our lives. Spending time with Jesus! In essence, to spend time with Christ is to worship Him!

Worship literally means that which is most valuable in your life. The English word, worship comes from the old English, *worthship*. It refers to that which is worth the most in your life. So we know as believers that our relationship with Christ should be worth the most in our lives. Paul writes in **Philippians 3:7-9a**, *“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him,”*

Worship is at the heart of all that we are to be and do. In other words, before we can “do the work of ministry,” before we can go out and serve others – worship must be an integral part of our spiritual and daily lives. This is the message of this passage. Before we can be Christ’s ambassadors or minister to those in need, we must first spend time with Him and listen to Him. We will never be holy, unless we take time “to be holy.” And to be holy means to be like Christ.

You know there is an old saying, “You are known by the company you keep.” In other words, you become like the people you associate with. The only way I will become like Christ is if I spend time with Him. And the way I spend time with Him is by stopping everything else I am doing and totally focusing on Him! That is what having a devotional time means. If I am going to spend time with the Lord, that means saying no to everything else that takes up my time! You are here today because you thought time with the Lord in His house is more important than spending time golfing, sleeping, or doing something else.

WORK OR WORSHIP?

Mary of Bethany is seen three times in the gospel record and on each occasion, she is at the same place: *at the feet of Jesus*. Here in Luke 10, she sat at His feet and listened to His Word. In Jn. 11:32, she fell at His feet and shared her woe. In Jn. 12:3 she came to his feet and poured out her worship. Sometimes Mary and Martha are contrasted as though a believer must make a choice between being a worker like Martha or a worshipper like Mary. But I don't believe that the message here is either/or. I believe God calls us into balance. We are to imitate Mary in her worship and Martha in our work.

Consider Martha's response. She welcomed Jesus with gracious hospitality but then neglected Him as she prepared an elaborate meal that He did not need! Certainly a meal was appropriate, but what we do with Christ is far more important than what we do for Christ.

Few things are as damaging to the Christian life as trying to work without taking time to commune with Christ. Jesus said in **Jn. 15:5**, “*For without me you can do nothing.*” Mary, on the other hand, knew that she could not live by bread alone. She chose the better part.

Whenever we criticize others and pity ourselves because we feel overworked, we had better take time to examine our lives. Perhaps we have been ignoring the Lord. Martha was trying to serve two Masters. If serving Christ makes us difficult to live with, then something is terribly wrong with our service.

The key is to have the right priorities. Jesus first, others second, ourselves last. We must spend time at the feet of Jesus every single day, letting Him share His Word with us. The most important part of the Christian life is the part that only God sees! Unless we meet Christ personally and privately each day, we will end up like Martha, busy but not blessed.

Whenever people are struggling personally or spiritually, I usually ask them if they have been spending time with the Lord. And they usually respond by saying that they had stopped reading their Bible and praying a long time ago. My response is simple and straightforward – now is the time to get back into God's Word and worship in His Church. The truth is that the only way to withstand the storms of life is to build our lives on the Rock that is Christ. And the only way to build our lives on the Rock of Christ is to spend time with Him.

Notice again our mission statement. Three of the four actions listed – worship, prayer, and biblical study – all involve spending time with Jesus. Before we can truly do Christian outreach effectively, we must take time to do the other three!

It is important to see later that Martha did find the better way. For in **John 12:1-2** we find that she prepared a feast for Jesus, the Twelve, her brother and sister – 15 people - and did not utter one word of complaint! She had God's peace in her heart because she learned to sit at the feet of Jesus. Yes, we are to be ambassadors for Christ – to go out and share the good news. Yes, we are called to reach out to those suffering physically and emotionally and financially – that is what love thy neighbor means, but the foundation for all of the above is that we be found first at the feet of Jesus, that we be found spending time with our Lord each and every day.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!