

Mary and Martha, Logos and Diakonia

Luke 10:38-42.

The story of Mary and Martha has always been a bit hard for me to swallow. As a mom, wife, church worker and artist, it is very difficult for me to balance the relationship of working and spending time at Jesus' feet. I imagine it will be a lifelong lesson. Of course, if I was a 'Mary' personality, things might be easier because Jesus praises Mary for her choice to be with Him. But that's not my challenge. In fact it's just the opposite. After studying this passage again recently, God revealed a few more truths that really helped me see the point of this scripture and how it applies to my life as a child of God living in a very busy world.

Martha opened her home and spent time preparing food that would nourish and please those whom she cared for – especially the Lord, Jesus! I'm sure she was carefully planning some wonderful things to feed the hungry crowd who had come to fellowship. As well as spending long days in preparation, it's reasonable to assume that she spent a significant amount of her own money on all the food. Being a 'Martha' myself, I can easily see this as her sacrificial act of ministry, and I am sure it brought her great joy to prepare and serve that meal. I love hosting parties and pleasing people with good food and fellowship, even if it does make me crabby while I'm doing it (no pun intended). This was Martha's first fruits offering, and, sadly, she often gets slammed for it. People sometimes mistake this story for the idea that 'working' is not Godly; but that's not the Biblical case at all. Among many, there are two distinct concepts at play here –

#1. Studying of the Word (**logos** in Greek) in relation to acts of ministry (**diakonia** in Greek), and

#2. Feeding on the right food (choosing the better portion).

Interestingly, Jesus talks about food quite a bit throughout the gospels. In his amazing teaching fashion, Jesus relates our every day needs to critical eternal lessons. Consider the following passages from the book of John -

John 6:26 I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. **Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life**, which the Son of Man will give you. On him, God the Father has placed his seal of approval.

John 6:32 I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. **For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**

John 6:35 I **am the bread of life**. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 6:53 I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, **so the one who feeds on me will live because of me**. This is the

bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.

John 4:31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have **food to eat** that you know nothing about."

Along with Jesus referring to himself as 'food,' he is also called 'the Word' in the familiar John passage, "In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God." (John 1:1) He is also called 'the Word' in John 1:14, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

The Greek translation for "Word" is 'Logos' and, amazingly, that is the same word used in our Mary/Martha story! "She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said." (Luke 10:39) According to the original language, a good translation would be "She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to His words." [Logos]

And in the following verse, we're told that "Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'" Another way to translate "preparations that had to be made," or diakonia, would be "But Martha was distracted by all the ministry."

Mary sat and listened to Jesus - 'logos,' 'word of God,' 'bread of life,' while Martha was working in ministry to prepare 'bread' that would satisfy for only a short time. Jesus said that Mary chose the better portion because she had the opportunity to feed on the Word (logos, Jesus, the bread of heaven, the only food that gives eternal life), Jesus himself. It wasn't necessarily that Martha's sacrifice of service was wrong; it was that her literal food was less important to the people than the food of life Jesus was offering. At that time, Martha should have discerned that the preparations (ministry; diakonia) could wait.

This brings us back to point #1 listed above. When we consider Logos and Diakonia, are we supposed to choose one or the other? Spending time at Jesus feet, feeding on the bread of life, **OR**, serving and ministering with our sacrificial acts of love? Both are Biblically important. In John 5, Jesus heals a crippled man and has him carry his mat. The Pharisees, then, condemn Jesus for working on the Sabbath. In response, Jesus says,

John 5:17 My Father is **always at his work** to this very day, and **I, too, am working**.

John 4:34 My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to **finish his work**.

The Bible is full of Jesus calling people to work, serve, and act out their faith - and when faced with a choice of "portions" we often choose to feed on what we think will bring us the greatest satisfaction. Sometimes that includes hosting parties, increasing our finances, building our bodies to perfection, scouring self-help books, etc. While those things are not in themselves wrong, they only satisfy our hunger for a short time, but we will get hungry again.

When I have moments like this in my Martha life, I am always blessed by the choice to stop and feed on the Word. It is hard for me to stop - after all, I'm serving God, right? I'm serving my family, right? I'm serving the church, right? The Bible is the living Word of God and He never fails to provide life when I choose the better part. When I'm full on the Word, I am more equipped and able to go about

my acts of service. Then ministry becomes an overflow of the eternal life within me. When I put works (even ministry works) first, no matter what they are, I end up empty, dry, and drained.

We need the Word in order to serve (in order to live) but we also need to work to serve God. It's not a matter of "OR" but, rather, developing a discerning heart that hears God's voice calling us to feed on Him. It's about balance and knowing where your life comes from – a deep, meaningful relationship with God. Ministry is fulfilling, but not on its own. It has to stem from the power of God given to us in His Son, Jesus. And since Jesus ascended back into heaven, we have His word in the Bible. That's where we get our 'food.' The promised Holy Spirit speaks and interprets the scriptures so that we can consume the Word (logos, Jesus, the bread of heaven, the only food that gives eternal life) which, in some miraculous way, is Christ himself. Then we are full and ready to pour ourselves into the lives of others. Ultimately, we should strive to be a healthy combination of the two sisters; mainly Mary with a good dose of Martha. How about "*Marthy*"?

I think Colossians 3:16-17 sum up the point of Mary and Martha beautifully:

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly [*Mary*] as you teach and admonish one another [*Martha*] with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God [*Mary*]. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed [*Martha*], do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him [*Marthy!*].

God bless your walk in study, prayer, worship, and service from a *Marthy* in the making,
Kris Huston