

7.20.2025 Pentecost 6

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Genesis 18:1-10a; Psalm 15; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42

“Few things are needed – indeed only one”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Jesus’ visit to the home of Mary and Martha comes immediately after last week’s gospel about the parable of the Good Samaritan. At first glance, there seems to be no connection between these two stories. However, the parable of the Good Samaritan was caused by the question, “*What must I do to gain eternal life?*” Jesus’ words today remind us that with Jesus Christ at the center of our lives we already have “*the better part, which will not be taken away.*” With Jesus at the center, we already know eternal life with him.

Yet if you’re like me, you can probably imagine the feelings of Martha. Martha was busy and distracted by many things. She felt the full burden of life upon her shoulders and though Jesus was a guest in her home, she resented the time her sister Mary spent with Jesus. We might well ask, if Jesus were to visit my home, would I rush about cleaning and baking, or would I sit with him?

The one person who can lighten our worries and help us carry our burdens visits us every day. The one who frees us of the unclean spirits of this world is always with you. Yet we rush about feeling worried and distracted by many things in life. Today there are, of course, no shortage of things to worry about. We worry about hunger, violence, and war. We are in a constant state of “worry hurry,” rushing about, unable to stop for others. Our constant distraction only makes our feelings of powerlessness worse. Distracted by relentless advertising and social media, we aspire to the so-called good life of material things – which only creates a desire for more things that never truly satisfy our hearts.

We are constantly distracted by the news and media in all its forms; we even carry the news with us on our devices and phones – news telling us what to think and who to hate – constantly increasing our anxiety. It’s no wonder that people need tranquilizers, alcohol, and other substances to calm and relieve us, numbing us instead of empowering us for living. Someone recently told me they can’t bear to look at the news before going to bed, because otherwise they would never sleep. We are all modern-day Marthas in modern homes with the television on, cell phones ringing and pinging, trying to work, trying to think, trying live.

In contrast, Mary seems to have unplugged from everything to spend time listening to Jesus. There is something to think about here. This story is ancient, yet our need for spiritual peace is more real than ever. Mary’s example of spiritual quiet in God’s presence offers us a model for overcoming the noise, worries, and distractions of the world. Mary has chosen a way of living centered in the presence of God that can never be taken from her. The example of Mary and Martha

asks each of us: “Do I seek God’s transforming strength and peace each and every day?”

Like Mary and Martha, each of you have come into this sanctuary seeking the strength and peace of Jesus Christ amid your own worries and distractions. In word and sacrament, Jesus grants us peace, forgiveness, and renewal for our lives. Our challenge is that when we leave this sanctuary, do we leave knowing that Jesus walks with us? Do we call upon him daily in amid life’s very real worries and the distractions? Like Martha, the busyness and worries of life can daily pull us away from Jesus, separating our hearts from him and from our neighbor.

Years ago, I was a member of the Executive Council of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, and I remember being in Tokyo for a round of meetings. Morning devotions were led by Pastor Asami Masakazu (浅見正一先生), President of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church. Pastor Asami spoke about the spiritual battles we face daily. He very pointedly asked the gathered lay leaders and pastors if we daily knelt in prayer with Jesus. Then smiling, Pastor Asami said, “You know, we try to calm ourselves and escape life’s worries with things like alcohol and material goods, but the only way we will ever know peace and forgiveness is to sit at the feet of Jesus.”

I was a young pastor serving a two-point parish, flying weekly to Tokyo for meetings, juggling the responsibilities of parish and administrative work. I was the head of a Lutheran foundation and the president of the Lutheran mission and though I was in my mid-thirties, my relative youth did not protect me from burnout and sickness. In one year alone I racked up 160,000 miles of domestic airline travel, but also eventually collapsed and was briefly hospitalized. Pastor Asami’s words about spending time each day in prayer with Jesus reminded me to make time each day for prayer.

No one is immune from life’s burdens, from the weight of worry, distractions and responsibilities. Mary and Martha remind us that with Jesus, spiritual strength, forgiveness, and peace are always available to us. That time in my life of illness was the moment I began my daily discipline of morning prayer which has continued to this day. My question to you is: what is your daily discipline of prayer? Do you seek the power of the one who holds all things in life together?

Today’s reading from Colossians contains Paul’s great hymn about Christ: “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created...He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*” To spend time with Jesus is to experience the power that holds all life and your life together. In Jesus, our broken and distracted lives are held together by the God who brings life out of death, the one who frees us amid life’s worries and distractions. Paul says it this way in Philippians (4:13): “*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*” Jesus Christ lives raised to help you – to hold your life together.

Yet at times we go it alone, trying to hold it all together. Paul reminds us that it is God who comes to us, that it is God who initiates reconciliation for us. Paul writes, “*through him God was*

*pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”* The one who visited Mary and Martha in their home, the one who visited me in my weakness, is the one who visits you. Jesus the one whose cross and resurrection continue to give peace to all who open their hearts to him.

We often seek peace from life’s worries and distractions in every place except the one place that gives lasting peace. By the power of Jesus’ cross and resurrection, you are being raised daily to new life so that *you can do all things through him* for others.

Mary found the secret to life – that amid life’s busyness Jesus alone gives life, peace, and hope. Mary welcomed Jesus so that strengthened by him she might welcome and live for others.

This week in your prayer life, I invite you to meditate upon about one thing that is truly needed – Jesus Christ at the center. With him at the center, you already possess all you need. With him at the center, you already know forgiveness, peace, and eternal life.

In a world that often seems chaotic and without meaning, Jesus reconciles us to one another with a love large enough for all people in this world. In a world confused by the words of many voices, his voice alone gives new life, forgiveness, and hope.

Listen for him; he is the word of life. Seek him in his Holy Supper; he forgives your sins so you can forgive others. Open your heart to him and he will offer strength and hope to all whom you meet.

Only one thing is truly needed: Jesus Christ at the center. Amen.