

Jesus Comes to Your House

Luke 10:38-42

READ Luke 10:38-42

As we explore this story of Jesus at the home of Martha and Mary, we need to remember the context in a couple of different forms. As Jesus began His public ministry, He was drawing people to Himself not just through the miracles, but through His teaching. People were attracted, to be sure, by the healings and feeding of thousands and casting out demons and other such things, but they were also drawn by His words. From His very first sermon in the synagogue in Nazareth, Luke tells us that people were amazed by His words. They marveled at His teaching, both for the wisdom in his lessons and for the authority with which He delivered them. They had heard teachers before, maybe even some great ones, but nobody had ever heard teaching like this. Some rabbis might teach only by quoting other great teachers, not daring to interpret Scripture from their own authority. Not so with Jesus. When He spoke, people knew that this was teaching to be listened to, even, or maybe especially, when it challenged their pre-existing ways of thinking and doing. Word of His ministry and His miracles and His teaching spread throughout the region, and that word traveled faster than He did. It is not surprising to find Mary so drawn to Jesus as he taught that she ignored all the other stuff.

We also need to remember the context of the journey. Just one chapter back in Luke's Gospel, we experienced a fairly dramatic shift in the narrative. After the initial series of miracles and teachings and a whole lot of public attention, Jesus asked the disciples "Who do people say that I am?" and "Who do you say that I am?" – Peter answers for them all: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." A week later came the Transfiguration, where Peter and James and John saw Jesus in the presence of Elijah and Moses. Then comes the turning point, where Luke says at 9:51 that "Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." The preliminaries were done, and all things began to point to the Cross. That would not have been obvious to the people who were experiencing all this first hand, but Luke knows where we are going with this story. The nature of the narrative shifts, with a lot less emphasis on the miracles, though there will

still be some, and lot more emphasis on the teaching. Many important lessons will be taught by Jesus on this road to Jerusalem.

In sending out first the disciples and then later 72 others to spread the Gospel, Jesus had given them instructions about seeking hospitality and hospitable homes and villages as they traveled. As they came to the village of Bethany, Martha opened her home to Jesus and the disciples. Martha must have been the head of the household, since there is no mention of a husband or father in this story. In opening her home in this way, Martha sets a great example for those who will open their homes to Paul and Timothy and all the other missionaries who set out to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But some of you, maybe most of you, would have been terror-stricken by the word that came to Martha: Jesus and the disciples are on their way into town, and they will need a place to stay. We have no idea whether there was any prior relationship or if this was just a spur-of-the-moment thing. But is it clear from the incident that Luke records here that there was stuff to be done to get ready, and it was going to be all-hands-on-deck to make it happen. This was not just any traveler; this was Jesus! There was food to cook, beds to make, floors to clean, animals to be put outside, laundry to be moved off the bed in the guest room, fresh water to be brought in to wash their dusty feet... and they were apparently not quite finished when the Jesus, party of 13 or so, got to the door. Have you ever been there? Martha had offered a bold and generous invitation, and needed help to pull it off.

And there was Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus, taking in every word... and in Martha's view, not doing a blessed thing to help. Martha actually has two complaints: Mary is not helping, and Jesus is not doing anything about it. We will see these sisters again, but not in Luke's Gospel. The Gospel of John alone includes the story of the death and raising of their brother Lazarus. The personalities of the sisters do not change in that story, with Martha taking the initiative to come out to meet Jesus when he came and confront Him: "If you had been here two days ago, our brother would not have died." But we learn from the Lazarus story of the depth of Martha's faith, including her belief in the resurrection of the dead. That should help us with understanding Martha here. She

was committed to the ministry of the Gospel, and was focused on accomplishing those tasks that looked important to that ministry. Hospitality to Jesus and the disciples was important to the ministry. Jesus did not disagree – He knew as well as anybody that workers in the ministry of the Gospel needed food and shelter and basic hospitality; just look back earlier in this chapter for the instructions to the 72 people sent out on missions. But His word to Martha contains at least two lessons for us as we seek to carry out Martha’s example of hospitality and commitment to the Gospel.

First, and most obviously, we hear Jesus talking to Martha about order and priorities. Dealing with the business and logistics of ministry is important. If we are going to take the Gospel to Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth as Jesus instructed, somebody is going to have to drive the bus. The people involved in that ministry are going to need to eat and have a place to sleep. Mission workers are going to need lumber and hammers and nails. Paul will be clear that the gifts that enable people to do all those things are all gifts of the Holy Spirit and all valued and honored in the kingdom of God. None of that matters to the kingdom of God, though, if we are not first driven by the mission: making disciples for Jesus Christ. We do need to feed people and provide medical care and basic security, but not as ends in themselves. All those things we do, from keeping these lights on to working with Love INC to supporting ZOE Ministry to children in Africa must be seen as means to an end, as making ministry possible in all those places. The people fueling and servicing the bus need to be committed first to where the bus is going, and we have to listen to the Word of God for that direction.

Less obvious is a lesson here about what we do in ministry with people in need. Martha had a gift for organization and structure and getting things done, and when she was done, the house would be clean and there would be a fine meal on the table. She was putting her gifts to use. But that was not what Jesus and the disciples needed right then. Jesus had set his face resolutely for Jerusalem and all that He knew would go with that. What He came to Martha’s home for was some quiet, peaceful time with friends as they passed through on what He knew would be a difficult journey. There would be time for

the other stuff, but not now. Martha was focused on what she could do, not on the nature of the need. Jesus said, “Martha, let’s just sit and visit a while. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich will be just fine.” The disconnect between the need and the offering can be closed by listening. We should not be offering mission or ministry based on what we can do; we should be determining the need and listening to God’s direction to us in using the gifts He has given us to meet those needs.

Do you see the common thread in those lessons? Listen. Slow down from all the stuff you are doing, even the stuff that no one would question the importance of, and listen for God’s direction. Pay attention to the needs of the world around you, not just to the parts that you are naturally attuned to, but really listen. Jesus is coming to your house, and He looks like your neighbor. Jesus is coming to your house, and He looks like your co-worker who is having a really bad day. Jesus is coming to your house, and He looks tired and hungry and sick – and He is bringing His friends. Jesus is coming to your house, and He looks like He is on a mission and is asking for your help. Listen. Jesus is coming to your house. Make Him welcome.

Amen

[Prayer for us to cut out the distractions and LISTEN]