

## **Distracted With Much Serving.**

Text: Luke 10:38-42

Suggested Hymns:

354, 153, 348, 840, 377

1) Martha is distracted

2) The world today is also distracted

3) Are we also distracted?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 10:38-42, <sup>38</sup> *Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. <sup>39</sup> And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." <sup>41</sup> And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. <sup>42</sup> "But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

St. Luke's account of this incident in the home of Mary and Martha follows immediately after the story of the Good Samaritan. In our text we note that Jesus did not censure Martha because she served, but because she was distracted with much serving.

It was a great and exciting event for Mary and Martha when this unique Friend of theirs came to be a guest of honour in their home. Both indicated this feeling in their subsequent actions.

Mary sat at Jesus' feet like a pupil before a teacher. She was eager to listen. Martha, on the other hand, recognised the honour due to Jesus by preparing a meal suitable for this special occasion. May the Lord bless our meditation as we consider the topic, "*Distracted with much serving.*"

### **1. Martha Is Distracted**

It did not take long before the preparations for the meal became so elaborate that Martha became *“distracted with much serving.”* And being convinced of the importance of her preparations, she was somewhat irritated with Mary, who at the moment seemed unaware of the necessity of preparing the meal.

*“Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?”* she asked. Now note Jesus’ soft rebuke. *“Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. <sup>42</sup> “But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”*

Martha was anxious and troubled about many things. Many things which were at the moment not too important. She was preparing an elaborate meal with many dishes when a few or even one would have been enough. The important thing about Jesus’ visit was not an opportunity to feed Him, but to be fed by Him with His Word. Martha overlooked this because she allowed herself to be distracted or overwhelmed with much serving.

Martha’s mistake was that she really was wasting valuable time. First of all, she missed the vital importance of the moment. She wanted to serve bread when in her home was the *“Bread of Life.”* She was starving her soul in order to care for the body. *“One thing is needful.”* This not only points to the simple needs of Jesus, but to the one really necessary activity on this occasion. Mary had chosen this good part, this really needful thing. She sat at Jesus’ feet *“and heard His Word.”*

Secondly, Martha was not only wasting the opportunity, but she was not really being helpful. Martha lost the perspective in which her serving must be judged. Her activity was out of context. Having lost the Word of Christ, at least on this occasion, she lost the meaning of her work.

The result was that it no longer was significant to anyone concerned, not to Jesus, Mary, or herself. Jesus certainly did not need the elaborate meal, nor did He expect it. Mary did not consider it important either. *“Then why all this bother?”* Jesus is saying.

The story of Mary and Martha illustrates for us these two truths. First, one can lose his soul even while engaged in a program of very useful activity; and, secondly, our labours must always be closely connected with our sitting at the Lord’s feet and listening to His Word if they are to be helpful and meaningful.

We would like to think that Martha did not forget this incident which happened in her home. Yet, if she did, we would not be qualified to sit in judgment over her. For we, in our day, have all been guilty of forgetting *“the one thing needful.”*

## **2. The World Today Is Also Distracted**

Think of the many things by which our world today is distracted. Power, wealth, honour, prestige, military might, security, warfare and terrorism. These are only some of the things about which the world is anxious and troubled.

The world is distracted by the search for material bread but passes by the Bread of Life. Our Saviour, the Lord of the earth, goes unheeded. His Word of peace and salvation through faith in His death and resurrection is spoken to all people. Scripture says *“Many are called, but few chosen.”*<sup>1</sup>

We also note that even churches are sometimes distracted. In the church we find this distraction over much serving. Many a congregation finds itself so busy with many fine activities that it loses sight of its real mission.

Think of the many organisations in busy parishes, each with its numerous projects and meetings, its parties, dinners, cake sales, and garage sales. Or think of the many sports and leisure activities, and the various church teams attached to the larger parishes.

None of these activities are wrong. All of them may be worth while and may serve a useful purpose. The only point here is that it is so easy for a congregation to become distracted by its many activities, and become distracted from gathering around the Word and Sacrament.

## **3. Are We Also Distracted?**

Look at yourself and your home. Aren't we, like Martha, busy, anxious, concerned about making a living, entertaining ourselves, improving our homes, following a hobby, or attending meetings? The result is that we are *“distracted with much serving.”*

We are distracted from the *“one thing needful,”* from the *“good part”* chosen by Mary. The seeming importance and urgency of the details of living give us the wrong perspective. We make elaborate provisions for the physical

aspects of our life, but rarely give sufficient time to the satisfaction of our spiritual needs.

Why are people distracted? Why is it that we so often do not take time for family devotions or private prayers? Why do we spend around sixty hours a week sleeping and eating to refresh our bodies and then find it difficult to spend more than a few hours a week in worship and Bible study to refresh our souls?

We are in truth like Martha, busy with many things, which are relatively unimportant when compared with our soul's welfare. Would not Jesus say to us if He were to visit us into our homes, "*One thing is needful*"?

Then there is the penalty of distraction. We make a great effort to become as rich as possible in material goods, but we remain spiritually poor. We spend much time in improving and growing in our job or profession, but remain beginners in the Christian faith.

We remain spiritual midgets because we are distracted from the really important Word of Life by being busy with many things of lesser importance. Our souls are starving while we are troubled with "*much serving*."

But more than this. Like Martha's, our work loses significance and meaning when it is separated from our "*sitting at Jesus' feet*." This is another problem of our times. Not only are we busy and distracted, but we can find no eternal meaning for what we do. Most people see in their work only a means to an end, a means of making a living, a wage.

Service to our fellow citizens is largely viewed in terms of self-interest. And so we grow weary of working at the same machine or of assembling the same parts. We tire of the routines of the farm or office; we grow dissatisfied and irritable on the job and in the home. We have lost the meaning and significance of our labours.

We need to learn the remedy from Jesus. When we sit at Jesus' feet, we hear again and again those comforting promises of forgiveness and pardon through His blood, and that we are made children again of the heavenly Father, and heirs of eternal life.

From this perspective, as disciples of Jesus who are constantly in touch with Him through worship and the study of our Bibles, our work, our service to

others, assumes a new meaning. We work first of all to God's glory as His servants; and, secondly, we are God's instruments through which He works on behalf of our neighbour.

This gives a new meaning to our service. When we work in this spirit and with this background, the assembly line becomes a means of God to care for people's needs and desires. The farm routines become ways of providing food for God's creatures. The office work we do contributes to the supplying clothes, food, and gadgets for people. This means that anything we do becomes meaningful as a service to fellow men for God.

We become instruments through which God answers prayer, spreads His Word, and makes history. All this because we sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His teaching.

Then there is the service to meet the special needs of some people. If this is true of the ordinary, everyday activities of life, how much more will it be true of those activities through which we have the opportunity to serve our fellow men in their special needs.

All too many of our fellow redeemed are like the unfortunate Jew who was overtaken by robbers on the Jericho road and who was helped by the Good Samaritan. The homeless child deprived of parental care and love, the stranger within our gates, the victim of unemployment, the sick, the aged, the prisoner, and the multitude of people, young and old, who have been hurt and disabled in the struggle of life. These are all represented by the unfortunate man who benefited by the Good Samaritan's kindness and help.

In fact, all these are representatives of Jesus who said, *'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*<sup>2</sup> How richly blessed we are! We are given so many opportunities to serve Jesus in our needy fellow men!

The many welfare agencies all challenge us to serve Christ more zealously and with greater devotion, giving of our time, our talents, and our means that Jesus may be sheltered and cared for in the needy of our society.

Is it not true that we are not as ready to serve Jesus as we ought to because we have again and again neglected the opportunity to sit at His feet with Mary to hear His Word?

It has been observed that the most liberal and consistent support comes from those who, although not especially blessed with earthly possessions, are rich in knowledge and devotion to the Word of God. They have received “*the one thing needful*” with believing hearts, and they have gone forth to live lives consecrated to His service. The measure of our charity commonly reveals the measure of our faith.

As we approach the sacred season of Lent, and as we once more prepare to stand beneath the Cross of Jesus who gave His life for our redemption, let us examine our faith and the lives we live.

It is here that all our activities take on their proper perspective and significance. And if we find that the distractions of the world have drawn us away from the Saviour’s feet, that we no longer hear His Word as frequently and as devotedly as we should, if we find this neglect reflected in our lives, let us again approach the Throne of Grace in deep humility, seeking His grace and pardon.

Remember that Jesus did not ignore the penitent cry of the humble thief and so will likewise fill our hearts with the assurance of His forgiveness, and He will grant us His Holy Spirit to help us to show an ever greater love for His Word and ever greater consecration in His service. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:14

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 25:40