



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JULY 20, 2025
GENESIS 18:1-10a; PSALM 15; COLOSSIANS 1:15-28; LUKE 10:38-42

NO MORE FALSE CHOICES

***Luke 10:38-42** [As Jesus and his disciples went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."]*

Do we really need to choose between Mary and Martha – who follows Jesus correctly and who doesn't? Isn't it hard enough to be a woman in the Bible without being heckled from the cheap seats 2000 years later? But there's a larger issue here as well.

Personally, I am sick of being pushed into false choices – whether that's between action and contemplation, or justice and mercy – as if we're only allowed to choose one, as if God's not big enough to want all of it for us. We're told that we need to choose

between, say, those born within our borders and those born outside of them, or between the sick and hungry here or the sick and hungry elsewhere. For one to win, the other has to lose. That's just another lie, of course, designed to divide and conquer. Let's start by seeing how this either/or thinking works in our Gospel and then see what it might mean for larger questions.

To recap, we begin with Martha welcoming Jesus into her home, not unlike Abraham and Sarah extending hospitality in our first reading from Genesis. While her sister Mary sits at Jesus' feet and listens to him, Martha gets distracted by everything that's on her plate – and she asks Jesus to take sides on her behalf. After pointing out the obvious – that she is worried and distracted, Jesus seems to take Mary's side instead. He says: “Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Before we start taking sides ourselves, let's remember how much we don't know. We don't know what's distracting Martha. She may have more on her mind than the menu that night. To assume that her concerns are trivial compared to Mary's says more about us – and our perception of “women's work” – than it does about her. We also don't hear what Mary and Martha may have said to each other prior to this moment; we don't hear what Mary says at all.

We can read all kinds of things into the gaps left by this story. Perhaps we've been in Martha's place far too often, and we read a kind of condemnation into Jesus' words, the callous response of someone who's been taken care of by women for so long that he takes their service for granted. Or maybe we identify with Mary as one who's eager to learn and study. We might decide that Jesus' words elevate women – that we too are welcome to sit and learn as disciples.

But to insist on taking either Mary or Martha's side forces us into a false choice. We can applaud Mary for paying close attention to her guest, and we can applaud Martha for her more hands-on hospitality. We can also applaud her willingness to speak up for herself and not suffer in silence. In his response to Martha, Jesus upholds both Mary's choice to listen and Martha's right to be seen and heard. He doesn't tell Martha to stop doing what truly needs to be done; he just names her distraction for what it is and gives her room to respond differently. We don't need to denigrate Martha to elevate Mary, and we don't need to exalt Mary at Martha's expense. We don't need to take anything away from either of them.

So then, how is any of this good news for us 2000 years later? Well, on one level, it means that we don't need to measure our worth in God's eyes by comparing ourselves to others – what they get versus what we think we deserve.

God does not play win-lose games with us. God wants all of us to win. We also don't need to prove our loyalty to our home team by voting anyone off the island; we can embrace whatever anyone brings to the table for the common good. As the writer of Colossians points out, there's room for all of us to be reconciled at the foot of the cross – in all our varied ways of seeking God. Action, contemplation, justice, mercy – we're get to live into all of it.

That doesn't mean we can't name evil for what it is or fight actively against it. Of course, we can. We should. It just means that we can spend less time demonizing our enemies and more time discerning our own responses to the very real injustices of the world. To borrow the words of today's psalm, we can do what is right and speak the truth from our hearts without heaping contempt on our neighbors. Turning everything into a win/lose game only adds to

the destruction. Enough with the lies of an either/or world.

We can serve whomever God has placed before us, and we can listen to them. We can welcome the stranger without shortchanging those who've been here all along. We can protect the vulnerable from violence and deprivation - both here and abroad. The lines we draw are just that - they're ours, not God's. Stinginess has never

been a divine attribute. We dare not go cheap with any of God's creation, and we only denigrate each other and the God we claim to serve when we try. What false choice are you called to reject this week as a follower of Jesus? How can you speak up for a more generous faith, a more generous God? In the Name of the One who's big enough to want all of it for all of us, Amen.



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