

The One Thing

Luke 10:1-29, 38-42

Cradock Presbyterian Church

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Let me give you a little bit about chapter 10 of Luke. In the first part of the chapter, Jesus shows us what Christian mission is, what Christians should be doing in the world. He does it by sending out 70 disciples, who heal and teach. You heard that story preached just a few Sundays ago. Luke adds this delicious detail to Matthew's version: he has Jesus saying, when the disciples had returned, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning." If you want confirmation that the Devil is dead, there you go! Then, in the encounter with a lawyer that brought on the parable of the Good Samaritan, which you heard last week, Jesus explains the message the disciples have been proclaiming. Finally, to close the chapter, Luke brings us this story of Martha and Mary, which was actually the lectionary passage for today.

This mission is more bare-bones than you think. That part about "carry no purse, no bag, no sandals" not only means don't carry any money, luggage, or extra shoes: it means that the disciples will need to put themselves in the hands of those who want to hear the Good News. The rest of that verse, "and greet no one on the road," means to not stop and go through the elaborate welcoming and backslapping and talking that leads to the invitation to "Come and stay with us!" In other words, no glad-handing for a meal and a bed! These guys are really going to be dependent on the people of the town after they've gotten there, dependent on their response to the message they bring.

And why is that so? Think about how they probably entered a town. They walked in, found a place where everybody would see 'em, and started preaching. No need for a

church or pulpit, any place with lots of people around will do. So before anybody gets to greet them, they're hearing this message the disciples are bringing. Any invitations to enter a house and stay there *have to come from hearing this preaching*. No wonder Jesus said, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'" Since "peace" means "all is well," everything is good with life, it means God will surely reward those who give the disciples a place to stay in response to this message.

They went to "everywhere Jesus was going to go." What were they supposed to be doing? Two things, right there in verse 9: "cure the sick and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near to you.'" Cure people of their diseases; and teach them, which means, bring them the Good News. Did you notice that the word used here is "cure," and not "heal?" The word in the original here is a technical word meaning "cure of disease." We get our word "therapeutic" from it. The usual word for *heal* is a different word, and remember, that word also means *salvation* and *making a person whole*. This "curing" the 70 will do is simply physical. It'll prepare the people to listen to the message. They'll take care of the physical needs first, and then address the spiritual ones! And that'll mean complete "healing."

Curing, and then evangelizing. Well, that's two things. When are we gonna get to "The One Thing?" Patience, my friends. Keep listening.

We're supposed to be the ones who cure people in order to fully heal them, too, you and I, just like those seventy. You know how we heal 'em? In a very large way, by this Good News we bring. That's what brings them peace. *We're* not going to be "curing" anybody of any disease – we've got doctors to do that. You and I are not going to be

casting out demons; we're not going to be doing spectacular miracles. We're not in the same situation as those seventy disciples. For us, the healing will all be done by God through the Holy Spirit. We won't be able to see it take place, not like they could; but we'll see its results. We'll heal by teaching people about the Good News of Jesus Christ. That opens them up to the Spirit – and that's where all healing begins, the kind of healing that transcends just physical health. We heal *because* we teach, not as a separate thing. And it's that powerful meaning of heal, "*to save*," that we get to when we share the Good News.

Now we come to Mary and Martha. You get to know them a little better in John's gospel. They're Lazarus' sisters; they play a prominent role in the John story of Lazarus' raising from the dead. Here, they're at home, and apparently in the midst of housework. A couple of commentators have suggested that they were preparing for dinner, but there's really nothing here to base that on. It just says that Martha had "many tasks." The verb here is literally that she was "drawn to" or, in this case, it could be translated, "drawn away from" Jesus. She thought she knew what was important: get the work done! Strange, because she was the one who welcomed Jesus into her home, just as the ones who received blessing did to the 70 in the beginning of this chapter. Would you or I welcome someone into our home and then leave them to go and do housework? Kinda rude, isn't it? So was Jesus' presence so unimportant in her eyes that she just *had* to get back to her housework? What was he doing, anyway?

We get our clue from where Mary was. She was, as the passage says, sitting "at the Lord's feet and listening to what he was saying." That's the pose of a student, sitting

at the teacher's feet. Jesus himself was probably seated, as teachers of his day usually were. To Mary, this was a chance to hear something incredibly important, incredibly powerful. Any true disciple of Jesus did the same thing: drop everything, and sit at the Teacher's feet.

But Martha was "drawn away." Martha had all these other "worries," as Jesus correctly labels them. How could she possibly work this teaching time into her schedule? And when was Mary gonna get off her ----- seat and give her some help?! She didn't want to just come out and say something *embarrassing* to her sister – I mean, she's gotta live with her – so she says what she's gotta say indirectly. She brings it up with Jesus instead, kinda like she's blaming him, like, "Hey, Man, it's your fault for comin' in here and teaching!"

I get the feeling sometimes that you and I are more like Martha than Mary. Yeah, I know, you've heard that trite old take on this passage before. It goes deeper than that. Everybody always says, "Oh, that Martha, what a workaholic, she was so tied up she didn't leave time for the Lord, yada-yada-yada." Or the twin sister of that take, you know, "Martha, she got her priorities mixed up, she put her earthly duties ahead of the heavenly things Jesus was talking about." I don't think it was that simple, or that easy, and I don't know that it was just a one-time thing. I think Martha had forgotten the truth about Jesus. I think she'd forgotten who he was, what he meant to her. I think maybe she'd come to take him for granted. Yeah, that's why I'm saying that you and I are like Martha. *We've* walked with Jesus all of our lives. In a sense, we know him as well as Martha did. We're so used to him, we don't get excited about him anymore. We don't

hang on his every word anymore. We don't put his teachings ahead of our other "worries", all our other "things". We don't want to come and sit at his feet – we know all we need to know. We've forgotten about "the one thing" that really matters.

There it is again! – that phrase, "the one thing." What is it!? We still haven't said. It looks like it must be Jesus' teaching, somehow. We've already said, that's what he was doing, teaching, because of Mary sitting at his feet, and in the context of the other passages, and so on. I think that's right! But the passage doesn't *say* that – and when Luke or any of the gospel writers wants to make a point like that, they make it clearly. Luke *doesn't* have Jesus say, "Mary has chosen my teaching." No, it's something much more basic and at the same time more profound than that. See, Mary had to choose between leaving that room with Jesus, where she was hearing the things of heaven, and going to be with Martha, to do the drudge work of this world. She had to choose between a little watered-down "peace" and the true peace that encompasses everything and extends into eternity. She had to choose between an irritated sister, and the one from God who offered heaven. She had to decide to whom she would give her ultimate loyalty.

Mary chose Jesus.

Who would *we* choose?

Who do we want *the world* to choose?

Then what do we do? Those answers will decide our future.

Jesus is "the one thing" that matters. If you read back through our passage, and all the things happening around it, that's what you see. Jesus is "the one thing" the seventy

needed to talk about when they came into a town. He's "the one thing" that all the people who questioned him were supposed to worry about. He's the "the one thing" Mary chose that mattered. He's "the one thing" left to choose for you and me, and "the one thing" we have to offer to the world. If we choose Jesus, if we truly choose Jesus, then we don't have any choice, we'll have to offer him to the world.

And that's not so easy! I love digging into the language of the New Testament, because you find so many treasures in that thought-world. The word that gets translated "distracted" in almost any translation you'll read, has another meaning at its root. It means "to be dragged away" from something. You'd find this word used sometimes to describe what an animal like a lion does with its prey, it drags it away. Martha felt the pull of the things of the world so strongly, it's like she got *dragged away* from Jesus.

So how many people do you know who are *so dragged around* by their worldly problems that they can't even imagine that they have Jesus – if they want him? How many people in the sound of our voices are just about at the end of their rope? How many are so despairing of life that they have just about given up – and who knows where *that* could lead? How many wake up each day and wish they could just keep on sleeping? – because life has gotten so bad, they can't face another day. How many are broken in spirit, and maybe even sick in their bodies because they're so broken in their souls? For them, we have the "cure," the "healing." "The one thing" we have to offer is the Good News of Jesus Christ, who gives grace and eternal life to anyone who turns to him. He is their only hope of healing, of salvation, their only hope for life. He is the "one thing" they need. He is "the one thing" *everybody* needs. We need to offer up this "one

thing” to bring about their healing in every way. Friends, we need to get started before it’s too late. Does that sound like I’m going “end-times” on you? Yeah, I am. We need to offer this “one thing” before some people really do reach their end. We don’t need to worry about being rejected; we only need to worry about making sure that, just as the 70 did, we obey our Lord and fulfill our mission.