

## NORTH MAIN STREET UMC JULY 20, 2025 SERMON

### The Supremacy of the Son of God

#### -Colossians 1:15-28

<sup>15</sup> The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

<sup>21</sup> Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of <sup>[a]</sup> your evil behavior. <sup>22</sup> But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— <sup>23</sup> if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. <sup>25</sup> I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— <sup>26</sup> the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. <sup>27</sup> To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

<sup>28</sup> He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

Paul offers a cosmic vision of Christ as the image of God and the head of all creation. Through Christ, all things are reconciled. Paul reminds the church that this mystery of grace is now revealed, and we are called to remain grounded in Christ, growing toward maturity.

### **Luke 10:38-42**

<sup>38</sup> As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. <sup>39</sup> She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

<sup>41</sup> "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, <sup>42</sup> but few things are needed—or indeed only one.<sup>[a]</sup> Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from HER..

### **THE WORD OF GOD..**

Jesus visits Martha and Mary. While Martha is distracted with many tasks, Mary sits at Jesus' feet, listening. Jesus affirms Mary's choice to be present and attentive, lifting it up as "the better part." This passage challenges us to examine our priorities and seek a posture of faithful. When Jesus looked at Martha that day in that emotional scene, he saw some red flags, some warning signals, some danger signs, some destructive attitudes within her which were more harmful to Martha herself than to anyone else. Jesus loved Martha. They were good friends and that day, he saw in her some hurtful attitudes that were working in her like spiritual poisons, petty attitudes, which can devastate and destroy the soul. In Paul's letter in our reading today, he mentions things like bad behavior and alienating yourself from God.

Let's look at these dangerous attitudes which were in Martha. We may find ourselves or someone we know somewhere between the lines. When Jesus looked at Martha that day, he saw deep down inside of her the dangerous attitude of....

1. Resentment, 2. Narrowness, 3. Unkindness. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were like any of these. In our new series from our Lectionary, we are offered opportunities to write down the things that we need to work on for ourselves that have been mentioned in our readings for the day. Write down and tell the story of your church and how you have shared any of these three things. Keep the paper to yourselves and work on it during the week to try to not be like the Gospel for today. If you have never experienced any of these, then I invite you to write down **“How you have experienced God’s love and presence when you sing and pray together in this church community.** When Paul saw people alienated against God, he turned to song. And through that song, Paul demonstrates that we can have Amazing Grace when we set out to have it. And that brings us to the story of Mary and Martha. This is the story of two sisters. Mary and Martha were close friends with and followers of Jesus. Together with their brother Lazarus, they hosted Jesus in their home on more than one occasion. Yet, on one such visit from Jesus, they chose two very different actions, and the way that Jesus reacted to their choices is a very valuable lesson for us today. Most likely, the sisters did not know Jesus was coming, as he could not call ahead, and ordinary people did not send letters announcing their arrival. Given lack of refrigeration and modern food storage, Martha and Mary were probably not prepared to feed that many visitors, no matter how organized they were. Yet feeding the travelers was necessary. In the ancient near-eastern culture of Jesus’ day it was an honor and a responsibility to entertain guests. Hosts had to serve and guests had to eat, even if no one was hungry. Hospitality was a matter of honor and matters of honor were not taken lightly. When Jesus appears with twelve hungry men, social custom required the sisters to provide a generous meal. With little warning and no modern kitchen appliances, this task would be daunting.

So, if Jesus were out front of your house would you have the forethought to invite Him in for dinner like Martha did? Or would you be resentful or unkind because he showed up like that. In those times women did not invite men into their homes...But if you did, would you worry about everything like Martha did? It doesn’t seem that Martha was too worried

about inviting them in... She eagerly invited Jesus in and showed Him the kind of authentic hospitality that throws the door wide and serves the best I have. That was what you did then. So, picture Martha rushing around, serving and doing her best to make everything good for their beloved guest. And where was Mary when Martha needed a hand? Martha trying to serve dinner with *zero help*! And where is Mary... She chose to sit at Jesus' feet, listening as He spoke. CAN YOU IMAGINE THIS SCENE... The image from today's story. Martha is on the left, standing, holding a jug in her right hand and a plate of bread on her left. Mary is sitting on a bench on the right, and slightly in the foreground, looking at Jesus. Jesus is seated in the middle, AND Mary is listening and Martha is fuming...

It's pretty easy to imagine how that made Martha feel. Irritated, frustrated, resentful. Martha felt so justified in her indignation that she decided to do something about it. Martha's a smart woman. When she gets disgruntled by the unfairness of her situation, she wastes no time. She knows exactly who can fix things. Martha marches right up to the highest authority in the room and commands Jesus, "Make my sister come and help me." *"Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me,"* she said to Him. But, instead of backing her up in her demand, Jesus rebuked her! Jesus may very well have felt like Martha was imposing on him, after all he is a guest...but he did not say to her... Don't you know who I am?" Instead Jesus accepts Martha where she is, as she is, and listens to her tirade and so he tells her... *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."*

This must have felt like a slap in the face for Martha. Here she was, doing everything in her power to be hospitable and make it good. And Mary just sat there, and what *she* was doing was the right thing? Sound familiar? We need to get **our priorities straight**.....Jesus reminded Martha - and us - what to be "concerned" with, where to focus, and what should take a priority with us... it's a relationship with Him.

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It can become so easy for us to get wrapped up in all the things we need to do and the things that need to be accomplished that we lose sight of what the most important thing is. Isn't it possible that we can get too wrapped up in the cares of life? The highest priority in our lives needs to be choosing the good part, as Mary did: to learn of Jesus so that we can become like Him. It's a love and devotion to Him that makes everything else of secondary importance. It is to seek the riches of wisdom and understanding that are in Him. If we don't do this, how can we follow Him, how can we be His disciples?

This is not an excuse to be lazy, and not take responsibility for anything. That is another trap entirely. We are to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only! But what we do has to be led by the Spirit, whose voice we learn to hear by choosing the good part. There is no blessing in running our own lives based on our human understanding of what is important. Mary understood that she needed to learn more of her Master and to seek the things that have eternal value. It's when we do that that we can be a blessing, because then all of our works are Spirit-driven. Love causes us to listen, to learn, and to keep His commandments. Jesus said...“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” As usual Jesus is talking about us, not actual sheep. Take heed to yourself...Many people in our congregations likely identify with Martha. Feeling pulled in different directions, feeling worried and distracted by many things -- these seem to be common threads of life in our fast-paced world. And yet, as Jesus says in Luke 12:25, “Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” We know that worrying does no good, and that much of what we worry about is not so important in the larger scheme of things, and yet we cannot seem to quell our anxious thoughts and frantic activity.

We can be in danger of falling into the same trap that Martha did. We can be so troubled by what we perceive as negative behavior in others, and become so self-righteous in our good works that we start to judge others for not doing as we do. There are evil things get behind these kinds of thoughts. The whispers lies and accusations, trying to create as much

conflict as they can. And these things will eventually lead us away from Jesus.

*“Take heed to **yourself**.* Only that will do us any good in life. The wrong choice that Martha made wasn’t that she was serving and doing good. It was that in her work she had demands and criticism on Mary, rather than doing what Jesus taught herself! Let’s rise above all the noise and pursuits of this world and seek those things which have eternal value. Like Mary, let’s find that fellowship with the Master and with those who follow Him so that we can learn of Him and become like Him. Through the Word of God, fellowship, and prayer we become rich in our spirit, and God will give us everything we need in abundance. We need to learn about Loving God and Neighbor and we can do this by Loving by Listening. In Luke we are offered the stark contrast between Mary and Martha. Mary stops and listens; Martha stays busy.

Western, and increasingly, Eastern capitalist-driven cultures are all about Martha, to be sure. Productivity, getting things done, being on the move and available 24/7, the “never sleeps” economy— this is how you “get ahead in the world,” right?

At least, it’s what many of our cultures, seem to reward and call for more of, all the time. The core problem Jesus identifies with Martha in this story is not that she is busy. It is that she is in an uproar. She’s overwhelmed, distracted from what matters, and lashing out at everyone else. And not just her sister. Even her guest.

Even if Martha was overwhelmed with trying to serve her guest, a basic and expected act of hospitality, here she has blown it. She tries to use her guest to do what she, in her uproar, is convinced must be done, right now. The one thing needful right now, Jesus says, is to listen, as Mary had chosen to do.

If you want to serve your guest, or anyone else, you need to listen first. Really listen. Do nothing else. Let go all other distractions. Turn off the livestream in your head that diagnoses what others need. Just listen.

To love your neighbor as yourself, and to love God—both require this, first of all.

Turn off the uproar. Stop. Listen.

We don't know what Martha did next.

But we do know what Luke reports Jesus did next.

He was praying. (Luke 11:1).

There is goodness in work of all kinds. This story nowhere tells us to stop working, or only to meditate all the time, or to disengage from the duties we have toward one another. It tells us not to let ourselves become overwhelmed. It tells us instead to focus on what matters most.

And to do that, first we must listen.

We love and learn to love better by listening to God, neighbor, and guest—all whom we serve and with whom we seek to serve.

We should be listening to Jesus and not being angry, frustrated, and exhausted. Martha has not found sanctuary but rather slavery. She is a slave to her fears of not having everything done, of not being the good hostess, of feeling that the responsibility for everything rests on her shoulders. We would want Mary to get up and help, but Jesus offers Martha and us a reminder of what is important. He has come to see them, not to inspect the house and judge the hospitality. He has come to share the good news of hope and love. We need to take some time to listen to that news and to fully feel it penetrate our souls, flooding out the pressures and fears. What did you say when you got out of bed today? Chances are, those words set the tone for the rest of the day. Today we are encouraged to take this time, to breathe deeply of God's loving spirit. Remember to thank God each morning for the new day. Help us to be open to including Sabbath as a strong part of our lives. When we concentrate on Jesus first, we discover that we are never truly alone or without help. For we ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.