

St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church—Muskego, WI

Sermon for August 5-7, 2006—Picnic Sunday

Text: Luke 10:38-42

Theme: The One Thing

³⁸As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰But 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!"

⁴¹"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴²but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Why did God create us?

God is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. God has always been. We have a beginning. That means that somewhere along the line the eternal God decided to bring us into existence.

But why? Wouldn't his work have been a lot less complicated without us?

Did God need something from us? Sounds flattering, but the answer is "no." God does not need anything. He is the great "I AM," completely self-sufficient and independent. He got along just fine without us and still could.

Was God just looking to amuse himself? We do some pretty foolish things and get ourselves into some absurd situations. Yet, knowing the heart of God, he must find the foolish things we do a lot more heart-wrenching than hilarious, a lot more disappointing than entertaining.

Were we merely created as pawns that God could move around on the chessboard of this world? Was he trying to flaunt his almighty power? There are people who think that way. If there is a God, they say, he must have some morbid sense of humor, getting his thrills watching people suffer.

God created us for a much different reason. God created us so that someone could actually KNOW him and EXPERIENCE what an awesome God he is, so that someone could experience his love, his goodness, his kindness, his creativity, his wisdom and power. All these attributes of God were perfect without us, but they became much more meaningful when God could share them with us and we could benefit from them!

God is love. It's the very nature and character of God's love to bring blessing and happiness to others. He didn't need something from us. If he has "need," it's the need to lavish his love on us. That's why God created us.

He loves to love us. He loves to hear from us that what he has done for us fills us with joy. What we're talking about here is relationship, aren't we? God created us to have a relationship with him. God wants to be our friend.

We're often talk about God as the Creator, the King of heaven and earth, the One to whom we bow down in humble submission. We talk about God as our heavenly Father, a phrase that conveys God's love much more, but he's still above us.

But friend...friend brings God down to a our level. But that is where God wants to be in our lives.

Think about God's relationship with Moses. God talked to Moses, conferred with Moses, even listened to Moses' request and changed his plan of action. IN our first lesson, when the Israelites worshipped the golden calf, God was ready to wipe them out completely and start over with Moses. But Moses interceded for the people and the Lord changed his plan of action! Exodus 33:11 says: ***"The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend."***

Remember what Jesus called us in our Gospel lesson? He said: ***"You are my friends..." (John 15:14).***

Talk about God coming down to our level, in the same lesson Jesus also said, ***"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).***

God's desire to have a relationship with us was so great that when we broke that relationship, he took on our flesh and blood, he became one of us. He lived a perfect life in our place and carried all our sin to the cross so that we could be his friends again.

I share these thoughts because they help us better understand what Jesus is teaching us today. We see two women, who love Jesus dearly, serving him. Martha is running around doing all she can to make Jesus feel comfortable and welcomed. Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet, hanging intently on every word Jesus speaks.

One of the two, Jesus says, has chosen what is better. She is commended because she has chosen the ONE THING needed. Her example is the one we should seek to follow. Which woman receives Jesus' praise? It's Mary.

But why is she praised? Looks to us like she's getting out of all the work.

She's chosen what is better because she is focused on growing in her relationship with Jesus.

What is the one thing necessary for any relationship to grow and thrive? It's connecting with someone heart to heart and mind to mind. What happens when we suddenly stop communicating and interacting in a marriage? The relationship begins to deteriorate.

God created us to have a close and intimate relationship with him. He wants to be your friend—now and forever! That relationship necessitates spending time with him. Everything else in this life and in this world comes after that because your relationship with God is the ONE THING you were created for. Without it, everything else in life is meaningless.

Certainly, Martha was doing something wonderful. In her love for the Lord, she was serving him. As great as that is, it's not the ONE THING God longs for more than anything else. He wants to connect mind to mind and heart to heart with his people. Martha thought that in all her running around she was doing the best thing. But really, she was missing the ONE THING completely.

Boy, do we mess this up, huh? Like Martha we are easily distracted and troubled by many things. We're busy running around accomplishing all sorts of great and wonderful things. We're advancing our careers so that we can provide for our families. We are running our children to one event after the other so that they can partake in all the opportunities we missed. We are building beautiful homes to live in and enjoying the best of everything.

But the more we run, the more we miss the ONE THING.

Let me share a personal story: Several years back, as I blazed into the living room one evening my six-year old son began a conversation. "Daddy, did I tell you about the time..." "If you're going to tell me," I interrupted, "then do it fast because I am in a hurry." His face sank as he turned back to the television mumbling, "never mind, then."

I knew my guilt instantly, but as though controlled by a drug, bad priorities bulldozed me out of the house and into my “important” schedule. But what was so important? I don’t even remember. But I do remember the look on my little boy’s face.

Imagine the look on God’s face, when we repeat that same drama again and again in our relationship with him. We claim that God is our all in all, and yet we all allow all kinds of seemingly “important” things to crowd him out of our lives—things that, honestly, we won’t even remember years from now.

Put yourself in God’s shoes. He’s constantly reaching out to us because he truly wants to be a friend and we just keep taking him for granted. Day after day he sees how we enjoy all that he does for us, but so often we fail to even acknowledge it.

What ought God do? Like my son, he ought to turn his face from us in revulsion. He ought to say, “If that’s what you want, fine. Go your own way. As the just and holy God he ought to condemn us to hell because that’s what we deserve.

But he doesn’t. Instead God turns toward us, speaks to us **“face to face, as a man speaks with his friends,”** and he says, “I just want you to know that I love you more than anything. I’ve already paid the price for all your sin, including your foolish and mixed up priorities in life.” Because of Jesus we are welcomed back with open arms and limitless forgiveness. Because of Jesus God freely takes us in again and compassionately feeds our neglected souls restoring and rebuilding our relationship with him once again.

You might think that as a pastor I must get this ONE THING right. I have to be connecting with God. I’m a pastor! Unfortunately, it’s easy even for a pastor to fall into Martha’s trap, so busy serving, bringing people to Jesus, preparing this sermon and that devotion, that I too find myself missing the ONE THING. In helping others grow, I fail to find the time to grow in my personal relationship with the Lord.

But the God who forgives the prostitutes and murderers and the cheats also forgives me. And in his grace he has given me another day, perhaps another week, perhaps many years, to do things differently and to show him how much I truly treasure my relationship with him. You have that same opportunity.

Martha didn’t even realize what she was missing in all her running around. I can’t tell you how often I’ve heard stories of people who suddenly find out that they have only a short time to live. What do they regret? Not working longer hours? Not building that dream house? Not watching more football? No, what they regret is not spending more time with the people they loved. They didn’t know what they were missing at the time.

We were created for a relationship with God. Do we realize what we’re missing when we run around like Martha instead of sitting at the feet of Jesus? Is that why you feel so lonely? Is that why, no matter what you do, you still feel empty inside? Is that why, even though you’ve accomplished great things in life, you still feel no sense of true fulfillment?

As we begin our August worship series, ***Stop the World, I Want to Get Off***, God lovingly reminds us of the one thing, the one thing that matters more than anything in this world—our relationship with him. In the weeks ahead we’ll talk about how God wants to help us make the one thing THE ONE THING in our lives despite the many influences of the world that are working so strongly against us.

May God use this time, especially as we head into the fall and a new school year, to refocus us on the one thing needful, on the one thing when it’s all said and done, when the world is destroyed and nothing else is left but God, on the one thing that cannot be taken away from us. Amen.

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