

## Being and Doing

Ten days ago, I got a call from Joel, initially to talk about minutes from the congregational meeting. When we finished that part of the conversation, it seemed like Joel was not quite ready to hang up. I said, "Are you OK? Is there anything that you need?" A slight pause, and then... "Well, actually, Rob and I were talking, and Gifts of Women Sunday is coming up." Then the real reason for his call became obvious – could I do the message? "Uh-oh", I said. "Let me think about it. It is the busiest week of my semester – not a great time to add something. Give me until tomorrow."

As soon as we hung up, my mind began to race. I flashed back to a conversation at Starbucks with friends that same morning. We were talking about church and how the busy people always seem to find room for more. I had agreed with this and talked about how important it is to become involved, make connections with people, volunteer time, etc. It quickly became apparent to me that I would take on this challenge – not exactly one on my bucket list, but one that I am glad that I agreed to do.

Once my decision was made, my mind continued to race. What can I possibly talk about? What can I say that will keep the congregation's attention? Topics flew around in my head. I knew I needed to make it about women, but I wanted it to be relevant to everyone. I thought back to my ready excuse for initially not saying yes - "It is my busiest week". I focused on the word busy and recalled a book that I had read in a TPC Bible Study about 10 years ago, entitled, Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World – Finding Intimacy with God in the Busyness of Life by Joanna Weaver. This led me to Luke 10:38-42 – finally a topic!

Picture the scene in your minds. Mary and Martha are sisters and presumably friends of Jesus. Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem for the last time, and have to go through Bethany. Martha, the elder sister, has invited Jesus and his disciples to their home for dinner. She wants to show them through her hospitality how much she loves them. Once preparations begin, Martha feels overwhelmed with the details and distracted from her original intent of the invitation. Her focus becomes more on the meal being perfect, not on interacting with her guests. She becomes increasingly irritated. Her activity is interfering with her relationship with Christ. Martha's distraction and worry leave no room for the

most important aspect of hospitality -- gracious attention to the guest. In fact, she breaks all the rules of hospitality by trying to embarrass her sister in front of her guest, and by asking her guest to intervene in a family dispute. She even goes so far as to accuse Jesus of not caring about her. (Lord, do you not care...?).

Mary, on the other hand, has seated herself at Jesus' feet and is absorbed in his teaching – not a typical place for a Jewish woman of that time. She is consumed with Christ and oblivious to anything else. This frustrates Martha, who sees this as laziness. Rather than gently asking her sister for help, Martha asks Jesus to intervene. “Lord, don't you care?” How many of us have had that very same question? “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” Jesus responds, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, the Better Part, which will not be taken away from her.

There is a lot packed into these five verses, but, for today's purposes, I would like to focus on the following questions:

1. Is choice a factor in how Mary and Martha respond to Jesus?
2. What did Jesus mean by the “Better Part?”
3. Are you a Mary or a Martha? Can you be a little of each?
4. Is it better to be or to do?
5. What are the implications for us at TPC?

Jesus is saying that choices matter. Mary and Martha were both faced with the same choice – to work or to worship. How many choices do we all make each day? In the context of this story, Mary made the Better Choice, but it was a choice for that time, that place, and those circumstances. Change the setting, and Martha's choice might have been the Better Part. We can see that in Jesus' life. Sometimes he went off by himself to be alone, to pray, to sit and listen. At those times, he was like Mary. Other times, Jesus was busy – teaching, healing, feeding the masses. On those days, he was more like Martha. While we might focus on the differences between Mary and Martha, there is a common theme – presence. Mary and Martha are two ways of being present – both are necessary.

## **What did Jesus mean by the Better Part?**

Was Martha trying too hard? Martha opened her home – did she open her heart? The Better Part is based on relationships and being present, not works or service. God does not need us to DO anything. God want us to be in relationship with him. That is the better part – it endures. God’s love is unconditional. It is not based on our productivity. God desires companionship. Service will be the natural result of intimacy with God.

## **Are you a Mary or a Martha? Can you be a little of each?**

I know that I am mostly a Martha - at home, at school, and at church– just ask my husband! His most dreaded question from me each morning is, “What are you doing today?” Being Mary is tough for me. I am too easily distracted by all of the things that I have to do. I found my Martha coming out as I worked on this message – had to relieve the stress by reminding myself why I was doing it.

As many of you know, I grew up at TPC. Until college, I was my parents’ child. Returning from college, I needed to carve out my own space as an independent adult. I returned to choir, reluctantly moving from the high school choir to the Chancel Choir with all of those “older people.” I was asked to serve on Session, joined and chaired committees, participated in a bible Study. Lots of things to DO, the calendar always full. This pattern continues today. I recently said to a friend that I need to learn to BE more and DO less. I went to the Women’s Retreat. That was an opportunity to reflect and share WHO I am rather than what I DO – a step in the right direction. I know that I need to bring more Mary into my life. How about you?

## **What are the implications of this story for us as a TPC family?**

In every church there is always so much to do. The more involved you get, the more you see that needs to be done. We need do-ers. How do we choose the Better Part and still get done what needs to be done?

We have some exciting Spiritual Formation initiatives at TPC – for individuals and families. Opportunities for growth are right in front of us! If you look at the offerings, there is a good balance between things to do and ways to learn and be. The road map is different for all of us. Some begin with a service project or a committee assignment (imagine that!) others begin with a Bible or a book study.

Study can lead to service or vice-versa. Both need to be rooted in our desire to be closer to God. Bring Mary and Martha into balance. Carve out time to be and do.

## **Conclusion**

The book, Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World, compares the intimacy of the Living Room to the busyness of the Kitchen. It says the following, “We can get caught in the same performance trap, feeling as if we must prove our love for God by doing great things for him. So we rush past the intimacy of the Living Room to get busy for him in the kitchen – implementing great ministries and wonderful projects, all in an effort to spread the good news. We do all our works in his name. We call him Lord, but, in the end, will he know us? Will we know him? The kingdom of God is a paradox. While the world applauds achievement, God desires companionship. The world clamors, ‘Do more! Be all that you can be!’ God whispers, ‘Be still and know that I am God.’ ”

Please pray with me.

Lord, it is easy to get so focused on serving you that sometimes we forget about you. As we go through our many tasks this week, may we be mindful of you in all that we do, that we might better love you, love ourselves, and love one another.

Amen