

Luke 10:38-42
Are you a Martha or a Mary at Christmas?
WRCOB 12.8.14

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A woman was doing her last-minute Christmas shopping
At a crowded mall.

She hadn't succumbed to shopping online . . . yet.

But she was tired of fighting the crowds.
She was tired of standing in lines.

She was tired of fighting her way down long aisles
Looking for a gift that had sold out days before.

Her arms were full of bulky packages
When an elevator door opened . . .
. . . it was full.

The people in the elevator grudgingly tightened ranks
To allow space for her and her load.

As the doors closed, the woman blurted out
"Whoever is responsible for this whole Christmas thing
Ought to be arrested, strung up, and shot!"

Yea, don't worry. It's already been done!"

Is this your kind of Christmas?

Are you a Martha or a Mary at Christmas?

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You will not find today's Scripture Reading
In the scriptures normally read during Advent!

Due in all probability to the fact
That it has nothing to do with the Christmas story.

Today's Bible lesson concerns Jesus
Who is in his early thirties
And actively engaged in his earthly ministries.

Jesus arrives at the village of Bethany
And the door of his friends
Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

They open their home to Jesus
And prepare to host him for the evening.

We find Martha busy in the kitchen.

Mary, however, is sitting on the carpet
At the foot of the Lazy-boy
Where Jesus is resting.

When Martha sees she is doing all the work

While Mary whiles away the time listening to Jesus

Martha becomes upset and comes out to scold Jesus

For allowing Mary to escape her domestic duties.

1

Luke 10:40 (NLT)

“Lord, doesn’t it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.”

However, instead of supporting Martha

Jesus gently scolds her.

2

Luke 10:41-42 (NLT)

“My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! ⁴² There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.”

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No, today’s Bible lesson

Has really nothing to do with the Christmas story

Or does it . . . ?

The sisters respond to the Lord’s arrival in different ways.

We, too, respond to the Lord’s arrival, Christmas

In different ways.

Like the woman in our first illustration
We can become worried and upset
By the busyness of the Season.

How many of us get so caught up this time of year
With all the hustle and bustle

That we end up distracted, disillusioned
Disappointed and depressed?

I hope the answer to this question is . . . nope, not me.

But the reality is stress and depression
Often become the uninvited guests
During the holiday season.

And it shouldn't be that way, should it?

It probably has to do with being either a Martha or a Mary.

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Admittedly, there needs to be balance between the two

Intertwining both the spiritual and the physical aspects
To the Christmas Season.

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But how about the rest of the world?

How about those who celebrate a secular Christmas
 Aside from the celebration of the birth of Christ?

They seem bent on overdoing it at Christmas.

They seem to go through the trappings of Christmas
 And lose sight of the CHRISTmas event?

They look to all the preparations
 The shopping for gifts
 Decorating the home and hearth
 Cooking and baking

To find that special “spirit” of Christmas?

And don’t get me wrong, sometimes it happens . . .
 The look of joy on your child’s face
 The beautiful decorations
 A particular song on the radio . . .

A sacred or magical moment sometimes happens.

But more often than not
 After all is said and done

After all the gifts have been unwrapped
 And the tree thrown out
 And the bags of trash line the street

They wonder why they missed the “spirit” of Christmas.

This, to me, is Martha

Who, after spending hours and hours in the kitchen
Preparing a feast for Jesus

Is left with an empty feeling inside

A table of dirty dishes
And the thankless task of cleaning up.

No, the story of Mary and Martha fits Christmas very well.

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Has the world done a disservice to Christ’s birth?

Has the secular world taken over Christmas

And robbed us of the true Christmas celebration?

Not unless you’ve become more like Martha than Mary.

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Now, I know this is an oversimplification.

Because we need both.

We need to be a little like Martha

And a little like Mary during Christmas
But there needs to be balance.

And if we find ourselves exasperated and tired

Disappointed and depressed

Than perhaps we've become too much like Martha
And not enough like Mary.

During Christmas Season

Let's consider Mary's posture at the feet of Jesus

Rather than the hustle, bustle of Martha in the kitchen.

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Jesus says to Martha

As he says to all the Marthas in this room

Mary has chosen the better part.

Choose what is the better, brothers and sisters

And it will not be taken from you.

Choose Christ at Christmas

And the mystery surrounding his birth.

Prepare a little like Martha

But be a little more like Mary

Not matter how the rest of the world celebrates Christmas!

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I close with a story from Garkida, Nigeria, 1992.

It was my first Christmas in Nigeria.

We were in the middle of the dry season
And everything was thick with the dust
From the Sahara Desert.

Not to mention the heat!

I couldn't get into the Christmas spirit.

No snow, no Christmas tree, no decorations
No Christmas music piped in
Over the Garkida market.

Try as I might to get into Christmas
I was finding it difficult.

I decided to go out and find something
Resembling a Christmas tree.

To the dismay of my family I brought home a cactus.

Well, I said to myself
There were no Christmas trees in Bethlehem either.

After setting it up in the living room
I accidentally rubbed the resin of the cactus into my eyes

Wow! Did that burn!

This certainly didn't help things!

I rushed to Dr. Nick's home
A Brit physician at the Leprosarium.

He said I hadn't done any permanent damage.

Ok, now where was I?

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I found an old string of lights left by another missionary
In the attic . . . you know

The kind with the real big red, green and blue bulbs.

I laid them, as best I could on the cactus.

The lights were vintage 110 voltage
The house wired for 220.

I found an old convertor box
Which buzzed rather obnoxiously but worked.

However, to my dismay
There were only four lights out of twenty working
. . . oh well.

I think Charlie Brown had a tree like this!

I placed the tree on the table
Along with a small crèche we brought from home

These were the only decorations we had.

I sat down to look at my creation . . .

A cactus tree with a string of lights
The buzz of the convertor box
The noise of a generator
And the small crèche.

As I sat feeling quite depressed
And feeling very, very sorry for myself,
A neighbor, J.J. happened by.

“Kwang, kwang!”

The Nigerian’s verbal form of knocking on a door.

We invited him in.

He said as he was passing
He noticed the lights on the “Christmas Tree”
And had to come in for a closer look.

J.J. stood there at the door not taking his eyes off the scene.

He removed his flip-flops
Like Moses in front of the burning bush

And walked quietly, reverently, and worshipfully
To where I had placed the tree and lights.

He stood there in front of the simple and stark scene
Staring at the small figures

Mary, kneeling beside the manger
Holding baby Jesus
Joseph standing ever so slightly behind.

Finally, he turned to us with a soft glow in his eyes

And in a whispered voice he said, "A holy place!"

It was at that moment

The "Spirit" of Christmas filled my heart.

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This Christmas Season

Don't be distracted by all the preparations.

Call the Martha in you from the kitchen

Tell her the dishes can wait!

Gather next to J.J. and Martha's sister Mary

And look on with wonder at the humble nativity scene

And let us thank God for this most indescribable gift

The gift of his Son, the Messiah

The Prince of Peace

The Savior of the World

Jesus Christ

In whose name we pray. Amen.