

Luke 10:38-42
Are you a Martha or a Mary at Christmas?
WRCOB 12.17.23

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The mall was packed

And as the wife walked down one of the aisles

She was surprised when she looked around

To find that her husband was nowhere to be seen.

She was quite upset because they had a lot to do.

She called him on her cell phone

And asked him where he was.

In a quiet voice he said

“Do you remember the jewelers we went into two years ago

Where you fell in love with that diamond necklace

We couldn't afford

And I told you that I would get it for you one day?”

The wife choked up and said,

“Yes dear, I do remember that shop.”

He replied, “Well, I'm in the sporting goods store next to it.”

~

I went into a toy store to do some early Christmas shopping

I asked the assistant,

“Where are the Schwarzenegger dolls?”

He replied, “Aisle B, back.”

~

I like it when my wife makes Christmas shopping easy.

This year she said she wants a gun

Duct tape, some rope, and a large sturdy bag.

I can't wait to see what she makes for me.

~

Last week, I told my grandpa

That Amazon is the best place for Christmas shopping.

He called me from Brazil.

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The question for us today is this

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 has Jesus, in his early thirties

Actively engaged in his ministry.

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

It feels, he's come unannounced.

They welcome him into their home

Jesus takes the Lazy Boy next to the fireplace.

Martha shifts into action mode
The sound of banging pots and pans
Coming from the kitchen.

Mary, however, sits down at the foot of the Lazy-boy
And breathes in every word from her Master.

After awhile, Martha sees she is doing all the work
While Mary whiles away the time with Jesus

She becomes upset and comes out to scold Jesus
Not Mary, mind you, but Jesus
For allowing Mary to escape her domestic duties.

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.

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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Today’s Bible lesson

Really doesn’t have anything to do with Christmas
Or does it?

How do we approach the Christmas Season?

Many become stressed by the busyness of the season.

They get caught up in all the hustle and bustle
That they end up distracted, disillusioned
Disappointed and depressed?

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

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

Maybe, it has to do with being either a Martha or a Mary.

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Admittedly, there needs to be balance between the two.

We need to combine both the spiritual
And the physical preparations to Christmas.

Many seem bent on overdoing it at Christmas.

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

They look to all the preparations
The shopping of 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 a 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
The bags of trash lining the street

They wonder how 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.

Mary, on the other hand

Focuses on the spiritual side of things.

She sings along with the radio the great Christmas carols

She has her favorite Nativity Scene on the coffee table
And a few favorite ornaments on the tree.

And she sits by the fire

And reads the Christmas narrative from the Bible.

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?

It has if you’ve become more like Martha than Mary.

Now, I know this is an oversimplification.

But 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 this Christmas Season

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

And slow down just a little

From the hustle and bustle

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Jesus tells all the Marthas listening

Mary has chosen the better part.

Choose what is the better

And it will not be taken from you.

Don't let the hecticness of the season

Distract you from the joy

Available as we celebrate the birth of Christ.

Prepare a little like Martha for sure

But spend time at the feet of Jesus
And experience the joy of Christmas.

~~

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

I've shared it before, but I want to share it again.

Because the experience helped me
Put things in perspective.

It was my first Christmas in Nigeria, 1992.

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

They call it harmattan
When the wind blows out of the north
Bringing cooler temps and lots of dust.

It was difficult for me to get into the Christmas spirit.

No snow, no Christmas tree, no decorations
No extended family to visit.

Nigerian Christians do Christmas differently than we do.

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! Excruciatingly painful!

This certainly didn't help the Christmas Spirit!

I rushed to Dr. Nick's home
A British 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.

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 our 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.