Luke 10: 41-42 What is the one thing needful? Pentecost 9 July 25, 2010
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Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.
God's Word, which is so important to keep our faith growing in Jesus is written in Luke 10:41-42
These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Hearers of God's Word, in Christ,

All of us have had times when we were waiting for something to important to happen, but when it did we missed it. Parents want to see their toddler do something for the first time, but the child is at the grandparents when it happens. You may attend many baseball games to see a player break a homerun record. He comes up to bat so you reach down to get out your camera, but while you looked away the home run was hit and you missed it. As Christians, we know that the most important thing we are anticipating is eternal life with God. How sad if, when the time comes for God to call us, we had gotten too distracted with other matters and missed the opportunity for eternity with Jesus. So the question is:

What is the one thing needful?

First, Mary and Martha would agree that the one thing needful is God's saving Word. Yet, Martha had three problems that Mary didn't have. The first was her priorities. Luke wrote that *"Martha opened her home to [Jesus]." (v.38)* She felt responsible for the welcome. As a believer, she wanted to serve Jesus and to do it well. This was her highest priority. One commentator wrote, "Martha's problem was not in her heart [faith], but in her head [priorities]. (Arndt) She came to Jesus and asked, *"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"(v.40)* Martha's zeal for the Lord threatened to separate not only her from Jesus as her Savior, but her sister, too. Martha was so disturbed that she interrupted Jesus while He taught God's Word.

How good are we at setting priorities to be with Jesus? If we are making a list of things to do for the weekend, it may include cleaning, yard work, special meals, and places to go and shop. But have we included a time to read God's Word, to pray with our family, and to worship? Like Martha we can be eager to accomplish many things, and they can be good things, but if we leave out time with God, we're missing the most important thing of all.

When Jesus began His ministry, He was tempted to change priorities to His way rather than to God's by turning stones into bread. But Jesus said, *"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)* Also, Moses warned the people of Israel: *"Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees…. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied,*
when you build fine houses and settle down..., then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God…."(Deuteronomy 8:11-14) So, let us prioritize hearing God's Word to not forget that our help is from the Lord!

A second problem was: *"Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made." (v.40)* It bothered her so much that she became frustrated. We shouldn't be surprised. When we make God's Word secondary in our lives, we can lose sight of God's will and become frustrated, too. It's good that Martha wanted to serve, but she needed God's peace and guidance that could only come through His Word.

The third problem for Martha was her sinful nature. We have the same problem: that we want to do things our way rather than God's way. At Martha's house, it was Jesus who was serving the most important food: His Word. But Martha thought she had something as good. What was the result? Jesus said, *"You are worried and upset about many things…." (v.41)* It wasn't that she wanted to be anxious. None of us does. But, that's the result of doing things our way instead of God's way. What if a manager in a store says to a worker: Put the fruit boxes over there and move those signs up front. If the boss returns later to find that the boxes haven't been moved and the signs are in the wrong place, he will ask the worker: What are you doing? The worker replies, "I thought that things would look better the way I want it to be." What trouble that worker! As far as God is concerned, the kind of mind-set as the worker is what He sees in us. He gives us His clear Word about helping our neighbor, about honoring marriage, about speaking the truth, yet we think we have our own way that will work. If we're telling God to mind His own business, we're in serious trouble! Saving human life is His business. There is no other way to be saved than His way.

People can all too often misapply verses from the Bible. Some years ago a man wrote a book about the prayer of Jabez. The Bible states, *"Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, 'Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.' God granted his request." (1 Chron. 4:10)* From that verse the author claimed that God wants all to be rich and healthy. Just say your prayers the right way, God will give it to you! The author became rich, but not others. Instead their faith in the God was deeply hurt as they lost their focus on eternal life. We cannot misuse the Bible for wrong purposes. It will only hurt our faith and that of others!

Second, God's Word is the most important thing for our lives. Mary *"sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said." (v.39)* While Martha was preparing for a meal, Mary was preparing for eternal life. While Martha wanted to
see full stomachs, Jesus was offering fullness for Mary's soul. Jesus told Martha when she complained, *"Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her." (v.42)* Jesus was not trying stop Martha from making dinner. I'm sure that after He finished teaching they went back to work and ate. But before that, He invited Martha to sit beside Mary, to put aside the distractions, worry, and discontent, and to receive His promises for her faith. She must have listened, for later when Martha's brother died she stated that Jesus could raise the dead. Martha didn't get that information from her cookbook! It was from God's Word.

We need to remember that God's Word will make an eternal difference for us. To save sinners, God first warns them of His judgment. Then his Word states, *"God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." (1 John 5:11-12)* Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)* How blessed we are to have Jesus!

We are to receive God's Word as God intends. He gives us His law not just to tell us how to live better lives or how to make friends. His law demands that we be perfect or die in our sins. We need Jesus' forgiveness before it is too late. God's Word warns us: *"Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you." (James 1:21)* Every day we can sit at Jesus' feet and hear Him say, *"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."(Mark 10:45)* Only Jesus could pay for our sins. Only Jesus could rise from death to prepare a place for us in heaven. That's the Word we daily need! It is not something which we can put off like Martha wanted to do. Tomorrow may be too late to strengthen our faith. Paul wrote, *"We urge you not to receive God's grace in vain…. Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:1-2)* The more we know from God's Word the better we can help others. Paul wrote, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

At the beginning of sermon I talked about not wanting to miss important events. Certainly, we don't want to

miss the most needful thing of all, God’s message of salvation. Every day we can either use God’s Word or forget it. We can receive the spiritual riches of God in Christ or live in spiritual poverty. The one thing needful is the Word of forgiveness in Christ. Let us make full use of it for ourselves and for others! Amen.