

**“It Will Not Be Taken Away”**

*But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42).*



When you think of a lion tamer, what do you see? If we were playing Pictionary and you got the phrase, “Lion Tamer” one of things your sketch would probably include, aside from the lion itself, is a person holding an inverted chair keeping the lion at bay. And there’s good a reason for this odd detail. You see, a lion tamer uses a chair or stool as a method of distraction, because when confronted with the legs of the chair, the lion tries to focus on all four legs at once and immediately becomes confused about its target, so it stands there paralyzed allowing the lion tamer to move freely about the cage.

Distraction. This word is prominently featured in today’s Gospel reading, and as we consider this text, it’s important for us to understand its meaning. The English term is derived from a Latin verb which means to pull apart or separate, and our contemporary meaning of distraction gives the similar sense of drawing the mind in different directions or creating confusion. And these descriptions make total sense to us, because we are without a doubt the most distracted people in the history of the world. You see, on top of the disruptions and diversions and that have always plagued humanity, we have smart phones! And these hand-held marvels of technology are distraction machines. Now, no matter where you are or what you are doing, you can instantaneously check your email or watch the game, look at the weather radar or answer trivia questions, monitor the stock market, do your banking, stream videos, take selfies, play games, and add your voice to the endless din of social media.

Distraction has become a way of life in the modern world and today, from our bewildered and dazed vantage point, we hear a story about a woman named Martha who, Luke writes, was “distracted with much serving” (Luke 10:40). Luke doesn’t include too many details about this character, but from John’s Gospel, we know that Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus were good friends to Jesus. In fact, in John 11, we are told that, “Jesus *loved* Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” And when Jesus came to visit them in their home, there’s no doubt that it was a big deal. Today’s brief narrative doesn’t tell us much about the visit, but we do know from verse 39 that Jesus was teaching. Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Son of God, the promised Messiah; Jesus, the miracle worker and healer and rabbi was in the house of Mary and Martha and He was teaching...and Mary was sitting at His feet listening...and Martha was “distracted with much serving.” Distracted with much serving – that’s what Luke writes, but we learn later in verse 40 that it’s not really Martha’s “much serving” that distracts her, but rather it’s the lack of serving she sees in her sister that causes her distraction. And we can all relate to Martha’s frustration.

If you’re like me, as a kid you probably perfected the art of scrutinizing the efforts of your brothers or sisters when it came to household chores. And whether or not you grew up with siblings, the tendency

to measure our efforts against the efforts of others is as natural to us the air we breathe or the water we drink. We are competing and comparing from the time we are aware that there are other people in the world, and if we're honest, every single one here today has sympathy for Martha's indignant accusation.

Whether in our work, or at school, or in our family life, we all have an eye on what other people are doing and we all keep score. This is even true in spiritual things, and deep down inside – in the parts of our hearts that we can't begin to understand and dare not divulge – our sinful nature monitors our performance and tells us that we are responsible for our own salvation and that the one thing necessary has got to come from us. And when we see that someone is not pulling their weight, or that our efforts are not being acknowledged and rewarded, our response is often one of judgment and resentment, and these self-righteous reactions can lead us to a dangerous place of pride.

“Lord do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?” *Think about this comment!* Even though it was posed as a question, what Martha actually said to Jesus was, “You don't care!” Jesus is sitting in your living room proclaiming the good news of a God who loves the unlovable, and feeds the hungry, and heals the sick, and shows compassion to the broken-hearted and promises eternal life to the unworthy...and Martha has the audacity to question His care! Martha's complaint is borderline blasphemous and yet, the response of Jesus is not one of reprimand or rebuke. He doesn't condemn her for her self-righteous heart or petty pride, instead Jesus answers her with the very compassion and care that Martha had questioned! And He does it by first calling her name: “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things.”

My friends, today, we have also come into the presence of Christ...and today, we are also anxious and troubled about many things. The distractions in our lives are overwhelming and we have, *all of us*, exhausted ourselves trying to even the score or work our way out of our impossible situations. And today, Jesus Christ – the Word made flesh, the Son of God, the One who loves the unlovable, and feeds the hungry, and heals the sick, and shows compassion on the broken-hearted – today, this same Christ speaks to us with the one thing that is necessary and, my friends, it doesn't come from within us. It doesn't come from our hard work; it doesn't come from our much serving; it doesn't come from the position we hold or the responsible decisions we've made or from our good moral choices. The one thing necessary is the forgiveness of God given to us in our Lord Jesus Christ who today serves us with His Word; who today comes to us at His table; who today forgives our sins, and removes our distractions, and quiets our anxious hearts, and today promises us eternal life.

Jesus Christ came into this world of a billion distractions with the one thing necessary and it is called grace. He came to bear our burdens and to carry the weight of our sin and to embrace the distractions that ruin us and to take them all to the Cross. My friends, in your baptism, the burdens, distractions, and sins of your nature have been crucified with Christ, and today this same Jesus calls you by name and He speaks to you with the same promise He made to Mary and to Martha: That He is the one thing necessary and that in Him you have the forgiveness of your sins, and in Him you have eternal life, and in Him, these things will never be taken away. Go with the peace of this promise of God that He has made to you today. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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