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Scripture: Table Talk - Luke 10 - Peace

In 1998, the Kellogg’s Cereal Company introduced, Breakfast Mates. Anyone remember them? Not sure if they were made here in London.

Breakfast mates were a single serving of cereal, Fruit Loops, Frosted Flakes, Mini Wheats and Corn Flakes that came in a disposable bowl with a small container of unrefrigerated milk and a plastic spoon. All in one package.

In their \$30 million print and television advertising campaign, Kellogg’s promoted Breakfast Mates as, the cereal for “today’s busy family”. The product allowed children to get breakfast for themselves while their parents slept in or got ready for work. It also made it easier for kids to eat in front of the television. At a cost of \$1.29 each, Breakfast Mates cost about five times as much as the same cereal delivered in traditional packaging. It also produced millions of tons of waste going into the landfill.

Kellogg’s pulled Breakfast Mates off the shelves only a year after they were introduced. The problem was not so much with all the artificial ingredients in the cereal and modified milk, or the incredible amount of waste being generated. The main problem could have been that it promoted children eating alone but they also found that kids did not like pouring warm artificial milk over their cereal, no matter how convenient it was and no matter how much TV they could watch.

The failure of Breakfast Mates aside, there has been a severe social toll of children and adults eating meals alone in front of the television rather than sitting with family or friends over a meal at the table.

When we separated ourselves from the table, the food is less nutritious and the experience is lifeless. Just think about the routine in your home. How many meals do you eat alone, or on the run? Or in

front of the TV or computer or distracted by the cell phone? It is interesting that in the bible, there is a lot of attention given to food, hospitality and the table. They are deeply biblical themes.

The meal to Jesus represented something much larger than just feeding a physical hunger. It represented the Kingdom he came to proclaim where sharing lives is significant. Nowhere was community more vibrant and meaningful in Jesus’ day, than when people were eating together sharing food, sharing stories, sharing each other.

In fact, the Gospel of Luke is full of stories of Jesus eating with people. Last week, we looked at Luke 5, and the significance of Jesus having a meal with the tax collectors, those deemed to be on the margins of society. We were challenged as to whether we have an open table, to host those who may be different than us in our world.

So, how did that go for you this week? Did you have an open table? Or did you accept an invitation to go to a place that was a little less comfortable for you or did you serve someone thought to be on the margins of our society this week? I would love to hear your stories and the way that Jesus showed up at the table.

Today we come to another story of hospitality found in Luke 10:38-42. It is a short section, and probably familiar to many of you, so let me read it first, then we can break it down a bit and determine the significance for us today. Listen to it, and see what stands out for you.

Luke 10:38-42

As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.

39 Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. 40 But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, "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." 41 But the Lord said to her, "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."

Okay, let me ask you a question. How many of you align with Mary in this story? If you can, you just love to take an opportunity to just sit, engage in conversation, live in the moment. The work will take care of itself. How many of you are slackers like Mary's?

How many of you can relate more to Martha? There is company in the house, you are preparing the meal so that things are just right, and when your help gets distracted or is not pulling their weight, you get a little resentful? Any Martha's out there.

As much as I hesitate to confess this, my personality aligns more with Martha, than Mary. Honestly, Carolyn looks after the bulk of running our home on a day to day basis. When we have guests coming over, she does the cooking, she is amazing but I help with the cleaning.

Two hours before guests arrive, I spring into action. I do a little light dusting, because then that will settle on the floor when I am ready to vacuum. Next I move to the windows and give them a little Windex treatment, remember we have dogs so we get those nose prints on the glass doors. Can't have that for guests.

Then, I move to the bathroom, make sure the toilet is swabbed, the faucets are glistening and finally, the vacuuming. I save it for last to suck up all the loose dog hair. It's a frenzy but with fifteen minutes to spare, I return the vacuum hose to the closet, put the dogs downstairs and am ready to join Carolyn for any last minute prep in the kitchen before guests arrive. Does any of this sound like your routine?

Why, why do I do it? I have taken some time to ponder that this week. I think it is because the condition of my home, the cleanliness, the way that

it is presented is a reflection of me. It says something about me. I take it personally and I don't think that is necessarily a bad thing, to want your home to be presentable for guests, but when taken to an extreme, it can become a distraction. It can take your focus off the main thing, which is hosting and engaging people at your table.

As Carolyn sometimes reminds me, the cleaning can become an obsession, which becomes a distraction and she is right. I have had to learn to back off a little bit and remember the purpose in the hospitality, it's to build relationships through Jesus, around the table. That is Martha's dilemma in this text.

You might notice that this story of Mary and Martha comes at the end of Luke 10. It is a whole chapter about giving and receiving hospitality and the placement here is intentional. It comes right after the story of the Good Samaritan which tells us how we are to live as followers of Jesus, to show mercy and do good and serve others whether it is a stranger or even an enemy, just like the Samaritan did.

But, Mary and Martha serve as a cautionary tale, not to allow true service to turn into mere busyness. Yes, we are to be radical in doing good, just like the Good Samaritan but don't take it to the extreme, where you are scrambling around frantically, overcommitting yourself and becoming overly busy. Don't let the service to others distract you from the ultimate reason for the service, which is Jesus. For people to see Jesus in you and around your table. Do you understand that?

I have had a lot of people share with me their hesitation with extending hospitality in their homes since we started this series a few weeks ago, and I would suggest that many of them have a Martha complex. Too busy and stressed over the preparations, that it almost leads to resentment by the time the guests actually arrive. This story is for you and me. Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus are mentioned on a few occasions in the New Testament.

You may remember the account in John 11, Lazarus is sick,

John 11:3

So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, "Lord, your dear friend is very sick."

This signifies that this family is close to Jesus, he has a relationship with them. Lazarus ends up dying and Jesus makes his way to his tomb and raises him from the dead. Scholars are divided as to whether this event happen before or after the story in Luke 10 but either way, Jesus had a relationship with Mary, Martha and Lazarus and often stayed at their home in Bethany, when he was travelling.

Do you remember Bethany? We have talked about the significance of this tiny town in the past. It was nestled only two miles east of Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives. Jerusalem was the centre of the universe in Jesus' day. It was large, diverse, bustling, a cultural cosmopolitan city. Jerusalem was where the nation's king had his residence, where the national leaders of commerce, religion, politics interacted worked and lived (like Toronto today). The country's wealth, power and status were all centralized in Jerusalem.

But, Bethany, only two miles away was almost the complete opposite of Jerusalem. A small, hick town that was welcoming and open to strangers. In fact, Bethany had many poor and sick because it was a place where they gathered and were cared for. Initially those in need would all go to Jerusalem, the big city, where the temple was so of course they would be helped! But no, they were rejected in Jerusalem, but welcomed in Bethany.

So it may be no surprise that Bethany was also a place that welcomed Jesus. Little tiny, obscure Bethany became a place of refuge for the Saviour of the world all throughout his time on earth, as he taught and healed people and as he journeyed to the cross. That is why it is not surprising that our story begins in,

Luke 10:38

As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.

That village is Bethany, where Jesus was always welcomed, and Martha's gesture of hospitality is

sincere and gracious. You can imagine that after a busy day, Jesus must have felt a sense of relief to see Martha and to accept her invitation into her home. He felt at ease there with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. It was like a home away from home for him.

Do you have those places? Whenever you are travelling and away from your own home, this spot is the next best thing? Where is it for you? For some of you it may be a favourite hotel where you know the service is consistent, the rooms are clean and comfortable and you know what to expect.

For others of you, it is a family member, maybe mom and dad's house, where you settled back into the room you were raised in. It still has your trophies and participation ribbons on the shelves and your Michael Jackson and Bon Jovi posters on the wall.

For me, it's the cottage. After today, I will go and settle in for two weeks, a home away from home, where I feel at peace and at home.

That is the level of comfort Jesus had with Martha's home. When he saw her out on the street waving them in, a load would have been lifted from him. This was a place of comfort and rest.

Now we don't know whether Mary and Martha had any forewarning that Jesus would be in town that day. We are not sure whether they had time to get the place cleaned up, swept and dusted or whether any preliminary food preparation was underway.

Have you ever had unexpected guests drop in? Many years ago, "BK"- before kids, those of you who are parents, do you remember those days before kids?

Many years ago, before kids, Carolyn and my Sunday routine was to go to church in the morning, have a nice leisurely lunch, read the Sunday paper and often times, we'd have Sunday afternoon nap. A distance memory now. But, on one of those blissful Sundays, Carolyn and I were woken from our slumber at about 5:00 pm by the ringing of the doorbell.

When I opened the door, I was greeted by a university classmate of Carolyn's and her boyfriend. He was holding flowers. That was a clue that maybe we had forgotten something. I invited them in and made a beeline up to our bedroom to get Carolyn.

That is when she remembered that she had invited them for dinner. In our panic, we hatched a plan. I would entertain them in the family room as Carolyn scrounged together a meal. We had some Chinese food left over from the night before. A little of this and a little of that and I have to say, my wife is a magician. She put together an awesome meal in a ½ hour, we ended up having a great time and we presume that they didn't have a clue that we forgot. Amazing what you can do, when put on the spot.

That was Martha. She perhaps, didn't know that Jesus would be popping by that day. And we don't know exactly how many would have been travelling in Jesus entourage and how many would have made their way into the home.

The text says that *Jesus and his disciples*, which could mean, Jesus and 12 others but there could have been a lot more because we know that Jesus gathered a crowd wherever he went. Either way, Martha's act of hospitality would include providing a meal for a fairly large group.

Put yourself in Martha's shoes for a moment. Yes, she extended the hospitality but how distracted would you be if a dozen or likely, maybe many more, crowded into your home? Add to that, to the high cultural value of hospitality in this society where you do not dishonour guests, especially important ones.

Then remember, that it is Jesus in your home, the one whom many speculate, is the coming Messiah, the Saviour of the world. And you thought you had pressure just inviting the pastor over for dinner.

In these ancient days, it took a lot of work just to prepare a meal. Think about it, you didn't have all the modern conveniences of our contemporary kitchens, where water is instantaneously available from a tap, heat from an oven or stove top is at your fingertips and a dish gets cold, no problem with a push of a few buttons on the microwave oven.

Not to mention the electric mixer, coffee makers, fridge, freezer, pots, pans, cutlery and assortment of knives. Meal preparation and cooking in our world is a breeze. That is what I keep telling Carolyn.

But 2 000 years ago, there was no prepackaged foods or spices. No Ketchup, or Frank's Hot Sauce. No running water, you had to make multiple trips to the well, hopefully located within a few minutes

from your property. The makeshift oven, over an open fire had to be continuously stoked and was located away from the home in the courtyard.

To prepare a nice meal on such short notice for a large group of people would have taken all hands on deck. Given their modest means, Mary and Martha would have had little if any, kitchen help. They were it. So, you can imagine the frenzy they would ensue once they got Jesus settled in the main room.

They would need to get some drinks and snacks for the tired travellers first and then on to the larger meal which in this day, usually consisted of:

A lentil stew seasoned with herbs. Probably served with cheese made from sheep or goats' milk, olives, onions and bread.

Fruits included fresh figs and melon, as well as dried pomegranates and dates

Wine, water and curdled milk, similar to liquid yogurt, accompanied the meal. Meat was a rarity except for special occasions but fish, especially dried fish was much more common at a meal.

This is not a simple undertaking. But you can image, this was something that Mary and Martha had done before, hospitality was what they were known for so, you can picture Martha in the kitchen area, starting to arrange the dishes, pulling out the clay pots and wooden cutting boards, making a mental list of what to do:

1. start the fire for the oven.
2. draw five pitchers of water from the well,
3. pick some fruit and vegetables, olives (I don't know do you pick olives!?)
4. Collect the herbs.
5. get the dried fish and cheese from the storage shed.

Okay. Mary, why don't you get the water and I will go start the fire. Does that work? Mary? Mary? Where did you go?

Martha starts looking all around the kitchen area, out in the courtyard, by the storage area. She takes a quick glance down towards the well. Mary is nowhere to be found. See the last place that Martha would have thought to look for Mary, would have been in the room with Jesus.

In this culture, as in many parts of the world even today, houses were divided up into male “space” and female “space” and male and female roles were strictly marked out as well. The public room in the home was where men would meet together. The kitchen and other rooms that were unseen by outsiders belonged to the women. Only outside, where the children would play or in the bedroom of a married couple would male and female mix.

For a woman to settle in comfortably beside the men where they would carry on a conversation; was bordering on scandalous. Only a shameless woman would behave in such a manner. So you can imagine the shock for Martha, when she brushes past the doorway to where the men are meeting and catches a glimpse of Mary in the male space, behaving like a man,

Luke 10:39

Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught.

Not only had she bailed on Martha in the kitchen but Mary had also crossed an invisible but very important boundary within the house and another equally important boundary within the social and cultural norms of this society.

And Martha is aghast. Not only for Mary's lack of concern for her workload but also her blatant behaviour. She is sitting at the feet of Jesus! Now this didn't mean that she was behaving like some docile puppy dog at the feet of their master. No, to sit at someone's feet in this day, meant simply, to be their student and demonstrated your desire to one day be a teacher yourself.

By assuming this position at the feet of Jesus in the male space of the home, Mary was quietly taking her place as a future teacher and preacher of the Kingdom of God. Just let that sit with you for a moment.

I can just picture Martha going back into the kitchen, banging the pots and pans, hoping to get Mary's attention and bring her back to her senses. There is still a lot of work to be done. How is she possibly going to get this meal together on her own?

Seething at the audacity of Mary. Martha is distracted. Do you ever get distracted? Some of you may know that our lead pastor, Matt Eckert is a big believer in personality assessments. He has been

trained in how to facilitate and evaluate the Myers-Briggs Test. Now, I had never taken the Myers-Briggs assessment, I just felt it labels you, puts you in a box but finally a few years ago, Matt wore me down, I relented and took the test. I came out as a ISFJ.

That may or may not mean anything to you but when Matt gave me the handout describing an ISFJ, I have to admit, it pretty accurately described me. There are a lot of positive qualities to someone who is an ISFJ; loyal, committed, kind but it was actually one of things to be aware of, with this personality type that caught my attention. People with ISFJ tend to catastrophize things.

In other words, make a mountain out of a mole hill and it was like a light went off for me. Yes, that is what I do. Carolyn, will text me and say, *Can you call me, I need to talk to you* and my mind starts to race...ten steps ahead. Oh, she went to the doctor yesterday, oh no, the doctor gave her bad news, she has a disease, she is going to die. I will be left alone. How will I live, I don't know anything about our banking, how to pay the bills online, what about the passwords. What do I do with the dogs? How will the kids be without their mom? She won't get to see her grandkids.

Oh, yeah. Distraction, which leads to anxiety and I am way down that road before I call Carolyn and she asks me just to pick up milk on the way home. Just a glimpse of the mind of the man who addresses you each week. Scary, I know. But it is distraction. My mind can naturally race to a place that gets distracted, anxious.

Martha, as great a heart that she has. As kind and loving and hospitable as she can be. She's distracted.

Luke 10:40

Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing.

Her mind is racing as she stands there in that kitchen. I have to get a meal together, it is a big job, water to get, drinks to serve, vegetables to cut, food to cook, bread to bake, how am I going to do it all myself and now Mary is making a fool of herself, sitting with the men at the feet of Jesus. Distraction gives way to anxiousness.

What is she anxious about? Maybe that the meal will not be ready on time or it won't taste as good as it could and that would reflect badly on her. Her hospitality would not impress Jesus or the guests. And Mary's behaviour, well that's a whole other thing! How does that reflect on Martha? It is an embarrassment to the family.

Martha is so distraught with her situation that she actually takes a rather extreme measure.

Luke 10:40

She came to Jesus and said, "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."

You can imagine how bold a step this was for Martha. As she too, now crosses this invisible boundary into the male dominated space in her home and addresses Jesus. She interrupts the conversation and in front of all the men gathered together, she rats out Mary. *"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."*

Now there must have been a comfort level for Martha to address Jesus the way that she does here. They are friends. They have done some life together and Martha goes to Jesus with her raw emotion, hurt and vulnerability. Look how Jesus responds to her.

Luke 10:41

My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details!

My dear Martha. Can you sense the gentleness and love of Jesus towards his friend? He doesn't rebuke Martha for her words, he lets her say her peace. Jesus accepts her where she is, as she is and listens to her tirade without blinking an eye.

That is the kind of Saviour we have. That we too can come to him in our distraction, in our anxious moments and we can "dump" it on him. Even if it is selfish, even if it is self-seeking, even if it is just plain pride and anger. Jesus is there for us, like he was for Martha.

But then he points her to the path of peace, he points us to his path of peace, his peace. *My dear Martha*. But he could just as easily say, my dear Paul, can you feel the love in his words?

"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."

There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it. Noticed that Jesus doesn't explicitly state what that one thing is, but Martha knows. We know. It's to sit at the feet of Jesus. No matter what distractions, what anxiety is swirling all around, there is only one thing to be concerned about, to sit with Jesus, come to Jesus, attend to Jesus in the situation.

Mary had chosen this one thing necessary. At that moment in time, Mary was more enthralled that Jesus was present in her home, than she cared about what others thought of her or her home, and because of that, Jesus commended her for her choice, to be with him and attentive to his presence in her midst.

Jesus gentle rebuke of Martha was an act of love- to her and to us. We all can be Marthas at times, can't we? Distracted, Anxious. With his correction in this text, Jesus is asking Martha and all of us,

Whom are you really serving when you serve a meal to someone?

Let's be honest, no one's motives are completely pure. We all like a little attention, a thank you or a compliment but when we feel compelled to serve out of a self-conscious anxiety over what others think, it is more likely we are serving for our own glory rather than for the glory of God.

Jesus seeks to free us from this slavery, just as he sought to free Martha, by inviting her and us, to stop working, rest at his feet and listen to him.

Here's the thing. Jesus never faulted Martha for her willingness to serve, to offer hospitality to others. Truth be told, if it weren't for the Marthas of the world, nothing would ever get done. We are thankful for the Marthas in this church, without them, all the wonderful activities that we offer would simply remain good ideas.

I think Martha is a type of person who performed deeds of kindness and love that made life bearable for people, wherever she went. She would probably sit by a sick child so the mother could get some rest.

If a family lost a love one, Martha would be the first over with a pot roast. She willingly welcomed many people into her home, for rest and a good meal.

Jesus concern was not for Martha's willingness to serve. It's the distractions, the anxiety and the motive he is more concerned about.

Martha's mantra is probably, "*Well is something is worth doing, it is worth doing well*" and Jesus response, Martha, you are distracted, worried, upset. One dish would have been enough. That is all you really needed to prepare. I would have preferred less fuss and more of your presence with us, around the table.

Jesus' mantra may be more, "*If there is a thing worth doing, it may be worth doing simply*".

We live in a world with a lot of lonely people, have you noticed? A lot of people eating prepackage one person meals alone or in front of television or computer screen. Check out any grocery store, there is a whole section of ready-made, one person meals. Yes, they need a good meal, but do you know what many of them long for even more? Company. Companionship. Someone to talk to, to be present with them.

If you remember a couple weeks ago, when we launched this Table Talk series, I stated that

Our challenge throughout this series will be:

What do the various meals that Jesus shared with others, teach us?

The application will be:

With whom and how are we sharing the table with others?

For the past two weeks, I have had a bit of a dining display up at the front here. Two weeks ago, it was a formal dining room setting. Last week it was a set-up of the triclinium, that open U shape that distinguish the banquet meals of Jesus day, and today as you have noticed, it is a picnic scene.

Hospitality is worth doing but sometimes it is worth doing simply. That is what the story of Mary and Martha can teach us. Sometimes we get overwhelmed and distracted when we try and make it too big, too fancy and too elaborate and

sometimes that keeps us from opening our table to others.

Sometimes, there is something to be said for keeping it simple. It is summer time, and what a beautiful summer we have had. It is a great time for a picnic. Sandwiches, some vegies, rice krispie squares, some watermelon. Keep it simple and keep it open. Will you invite someone around your blanket this summer? Less preparations means less distractions and more time to be present for those around the table.

Because you never know where and how Jesus will show up at the table or blanket, and you never know when and how Jesus will show up in the table talk. You don't want to be so distracted, that you miss his presence in your midst.

Amen? Amen. Let's pray.

Points to Ponder

Table Talk ~ Luke 10 ~ Peace

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Do you ever eat alone? Is it by choice or your situation in life? How comfortable are you with eating alone? What about in restaurants, is eating alone uncomfortable? Why or why not?
2. Does your personality naturally align with Mary or Martha in this story? Why? Do you have a greater understanding for the person you don't naturally align with after hearing the message? Why?
3. Describe the routine you go through when you invite guests to dinner at your home. Is it frenzied or relaxed?
4. Do you have a place that is like a "home away from home"? Explain why you feel comfortable there.
5. Do you have a personality that becomes easily distracted or anxious? What is it that takes your focus away from time with Jesus? What is it that reminds you to turn back to him and lay your distractions before him?
6. What do you think of the mantra, "If there is a thing worth doing, it may be worth doing simply?" Discuss whether there are areas in your life that you need to simplify. Where have distractions taken your focus away from Jesus and what he desires from you?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray for opportunities and a boldness to invite someone around your "picnic" blanket this summer. Pray that God can take those things that tend to distract you away and replace them with focus on Him. Invite Jesus to show you if there are areas that you need to simplify in your life.