

The Rev. Charlie Holt:

Let us pray, heavenly Father. Thank you so much for all your good gifts and blessings. And yes, Jesus does love us. And we're very grateful for that. And we ask that you would fill us with your Holy Spirit that the preaching and ministry of your word might be your word for the sake and glory of His name, Jesus name, amen. Please.

Well, we've come to one of my favorite stories in all of scripture, the story of Mary and Martha and the little exchange there. It reminds me a lot of dynamics that have happened in our home and in various social gatherings that I've had over the years and been part of. But one that it always reminds me of is when I was dating my now wife, Brooke, and I was over at her house, her parents' house, I should say.

And I was sitting on the couch after dinner, just enjoying myself and relaxing after a good meal, which was her mom's a fantastic cook. And my wife-to-be she comes out and informs me

that I am not doing the appropriate thing,

that the men, after dinner in that particular household, are supposed to go and wash the dishes after the meal. And I'm no longer considered a guest now that we were engaged. And so I needed to go and join the other man, which was Brooke's dad, in washing the dishes.

That's when I sort of had an epiphany that I have shifted from a patriarchal society to a matriarchal one.

And it has served me well that I learned that little lesson. But we all have experienced the dynamic of Mary and Martha, haven't we? Where the people in the kitchen doing all the work, making the dinner, preparing the meal, washing the dishes when

there's these lazy bumpkins out there sitting on the couch watching football or whatever it is on TV or enjoying the company of one another while somebody is in the kitchen slaving away.

And so it always kind of feels a little painful to come down hard on Martha in this, doesn't it?

Who here resonates with Martha in this story? Anybody? Come on, put them up high. Come on, Martha's. It could be like Mark and Marty, right? Some guys. It's okay to be a Mark.

But yeah, I think a lot of people, when they hear this, are like, "Well, what's wrong with Martha?" I mean, Mary was clearly in the wrong in this. And first, it starts out really wonderful about Martha, actually. And I don't want us to miss how important Martha is to the whole scene.

Now, as they went on their way, Jesus entered the village, and a woman named Martha

welcomed Him into her house. You hear who it was that welcomed Jesus into her house? It was Martha. Yeah. I have a theory. I have a lot of crazy ideas and crazy theories. One of my crazy ideas is that if we could convert all of the hairdressers and barbers, that we could evangelize the

world in a month. That's just one of my theories. But the other theory is that if we could mobilize the Marthas in a congregation and empower them to utilize and value their gift of hospitality and service, that the homes of the congregation could be centers of evangelism and discipleship, and ministry, and mission that would bring renewal and revival to the town of Ortega in the city of Jacksonville. That's just a little theory that I have. And I think it bears out actually from the Scriptures and also from my experience. Back in 2003, 2004, one of the largest churches in the country was Saddleback Church, at that time in California, pastored by a Baptist named Rick Warren. Do you remember him? Author of *The Purpose Driven Life*. And Rick, at that time, sent out these CDs that you would put into your computer. We don't do that kind of thing anymore, but he sent them out, and you were with a letter that invited clergy around the country to do a church-wide campaign called *The 40 Days of Purpose*. I think St. Mark's did that as well. Did you do *The 40 Days of Purpose*? Do you remember that? Yeah. And so the little CD sat on my desk for a long time, and then I put it in and there's Rick Warren in his Hawaiian shirt and he says, "Hey, I want to invite you to do this program with us, *The 40 Days of Purpose*, and study the book, *The Purpose Driven Life*." And so I invited my adult education director. His name was Ty Deadman. He was a retired Rear Admiral, and Ty had a really deep voice, and I said, "Ty, watch this." And so we put together a leadership team, and we did the set goals, and we were going to do this 40 Days of Purpose. And as Ty and I were thinking about it, we figured part of the component was you had to get small groups meeting in homes. We needed a lot of Martha's and so we were thinking we would get like 15 or 20 small groups going at St. Peter's. And that was a pretty ambitious goal for us because we only had about 250 people coming on a weekend. And so that was a pretty substantial percentage of our congregation to do it. And so Ty and I organized this leadership group, and we started planning, and we did all the training sessions with Rick Warren. And one of the things that Rick Warren said is, "I want you to think exponentially about this." So whatever goal that you have in your mind, add a zero to it. So just think about that. We were thinking we would have 15 to 20 small groups gathering in homes, and when you add a zero to that, what does that become? 150 to 200 small groups meeting in a congregation that only has 250 people coming on a weekend. And so we thought, "Well, that's kind of impossible." So we backed our goal back to 100. 100 small groups. Now, what we didn't realize is that what that meant was that half of our households needed to open up their homes and host a small group. And here's the genius of it. Number one, we had Ty Dedmon, a retired Rear Admiral, running our small group ministry. And he was kind of like E.F. Hutton of our congregation when Ty said, "Jump." All of us said, "How high, sir?" That's the way we all were with Ty. But Ty, I asked him, because what ended up happening is we actually had 70 people open up their homes in that congregation, and 700 people did that course with us at that time. It was really quite amazing. 65% of the people were not members of our church. And that's one of the things that happens is when you have half of the members of your congregation open up their homes; well, there isn't enough people to fill up all those homes. So they go out and they find friends and neighbors and co-workers and relatives and so on. And all of a sudden, you have this amazing gathering of people. We actually had more people meeting in homes for that study than we did gathering in worship, though our worship attendance increased by 100 during that campaign.

Amazing. And what it taught me more than any other lesson was the power of Martha and how, when Martha becomes willing to open up her home to Jesus. And we know when Jesus comes over to your house, He always shows up with 12 friends,

right? It's a small group. And all of a sudden, ministry begins to happen

in your home. But Martha, and this is the case with all Martha's, Martha has issues.

She has a problem because when she starts to think about the Lord coming over to her house

and His 12 friends, she starts to worry about stuff. Well, what am I going to feed them? It needs to be good. And so a five-course meal comes into her mind. And then we've got to clean the house and we've got to straighten up everything and we've got to wash the dog and we've got to clean up the yard and we've got to mow it and get the gardeners over and clean all that up. And we've got to do all these things. That's what the text says happened to Martha. Listen again, it says, "And she had a sister named Mary who sat at the Lord's feet listening to His teaching, but Martha was distracted with much serving. And she said to Him, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.'" The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you're anxious and troubled about many things, many things, but one thing is necessary." Interesting word, the word "distracted." I zeroed in on that in my looking at what the Greek word for "distracted" was. It's the word "pariaspea" – I'm going to say it wrong – "paris-pa-o." Paris-pa-o. It's not a very fun word to say. The paris-pa-o is a compound word and you probably hear the word "pari" and we talk about periscopes. And what does a periscope do? It goes up and it looks around, right? It scopes around. And so "pari" means around and the "spa-o" part of that is the word that means to draw. And so what a distraction does is it draws us around. It's the things that Jesus pointed out that are grabbing Martha and drawing her over here, and then I'm drawing you over here, and I'm drawing you over here. The poor live stream people are up there going, "Where is he going? Try to get me on camera. You can't." But drawing around, and who here relates to that happening in your life?

I hope everybody, because we live in an age full of distractions, where what Jesus challenges Martha to see is not the fact... I mean, this is the question that Martha asked, "Lord, don't you care?"

"Don't you care that Mary is leaving me to do all the work?" And the answer is not, "Martha, yeah, I really don't care." But Martha, you are caring about all these things

when I want you to see that your heart needs to care about the one thing more.

It's not that all those things are wrong. I'm serving and washing dishes and preparing meals and cleaning houses, and those kinds of things are important. They're valuable. That's an expression of Martha's love for Jesus and for His people. But what happened in her heart was in the distraction of all the things, she missed the most important thing that was happening right there in the midst of her ministry. And that was that Mary was able to sit at the feet of Jesus and really soak it in. I love the way Jesus puts it. He says, "Mary has chosen the better part, or the good portion is the way it's translated in another translation." When I hear good portion, I kind of think of a ribeye steak. I don't know if that's what it comes to your mind when you hear good portion, but you know that one, that's the good portion of the cow, is the ribeye. That's my favorite part. But then, even within a ribeye steak, there's a good portion of the ribeye too, isn't there? It's that little circular part. And sometimes I find myself when I'm splitting a ribeye in two, I might just cut that little part out and slide that over to my plate, right? Because that's the good portion.

That's the good part. And when you see that kind of thing happening, you might think, "Well, that's not fair. That's not right." But I think part of what Jesus is trying to get across to Martha is there's plenty of good portion to go around. And Martha, part of your distraction, the fact that you have allowed all these things to draw you by the reaction, is you have left off from being intentional about the one thing that you really should value the most, and that I care about the most. And that is just being with me and sharing in the relationship and being present with me and allowing me to teach you and to pour into you and allowing yourself actually to be poured into and receive. I've often seen that people can get so busy with ministry that they sometimes miss the point of it, that they get distracted by making sure that everything is done just correctly and so right. And they forget that the reason why we're doing all these things called church is because we're here to love the Lord and to just marvel in His presence and to enjoy His love for us and His care for us. And I think what Jesus was trying to get across to Martha was, "You know, Martha, yes, I care about the dishes, but I really care about you and I really care about Mary. I care about them, y'all, more than I care about the dishes. And it's okay if we let the dishes wait till the morning so that we can spend some time together,

just being together and learning from one another and sharing and fellowshiping together." And so here's the hope and the vision for us is one, I hope that all of you who are Martha's in this room will, one, be validated in who you are because without you, we can't do any of it. I mean, you're actually part of the backbone and what makes all the magic happen when it comes to the life of church and the ministry, and the mission of the congregation. By serving and giving of yourself and doing all the things that you do, we get to participate in the care and the excellence of that servanthood. But never lose sight of what it's all about. And we need to mobilize more of the Martha's to use their gifts and to do in the life of the church, but to do for the sake of the reconciled and personal relationship with Jesus so that even the Martha's will get to participate in the good part and then the good stuff and enjoy being with him and being with his people and fellowshiping together. One of the wonderful things about when the mobilization of the Martha's happened and the Mary's get to come and enjoy is the fruit of that is just phenomenal. That 40 days of purpose ministry that started back in 2003, for decades, two decades now, there have been some of those groups that have continued, which I just marvel at, that a small group that started by some Martha opening up her home to Jesus and inviting a few friends over has led to continued fellowship and deep bondings of friends for decades.

One group was called themselves the Purpose Driven Women, and they, through the course of the study, became best friends. They did everything together, and they would travel together, and they would meet in small groups. And Rick Warren's study just opened up a door to a lot of other Bible studies and lessons, and things that they read together and did together as a group of Christian ladies. And they not only became really good friends, but they became deep beloved sisters in Christ because they not only busied themselves with the gathering, but they also enjoyed the good portion of what the gathering was all about. And I think, if we're honest, some of us have had tastes of these kinds of gatherings, haven't we? And ultimately, what Jesus would have us see is that's the key to a vital congregation. That's what brings the life and the abundance is when everybody's doing their part and sharing their gifts, and enjoying the good portions of the fruit of all of it together. I want to close with a prayer and invite our baptismal families to come forward. Father, thank you so much for the gift of the fellowship of your church and for the Marys and the Marthas and the Marks and the Martyrs and all the people that are bringing their

various gifts and unique talents and services to the body. We know that ultimately it's all about you, Lord, and that while we can get distracted in the details,

may you always bring our hearts and our minds back around to being intentional about our relationship with you. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.