

At the Table
“Martha’s World”
Luke 10:38-42
Small Group Discussion

Intro Question:

- *(Leaders: the goal of these introductory questions is to help break the ice—they give everyone the chance to “loosen their tongue” by answering a safe, non-threatening question, that also begins orienting to the topic at hand).*
- If a new friend were to invite you over with the desire of treating you like an honored guest, what would you want him/her to do for you? Can you think of a time when someone tried to welcome you but was misguided?

1. Read Luke 10:38-42.

- *Note: the Mary in this story is Mary of Bethany. She and Martha are described elsewhere in the Gospels only in John 11-12. She is not to be confused either with Mary Magdalene or with the woman from last week’s story in ch. 7.*
- To what degree would you say that this story is so familiar to you that it’s lost its impact?
- What can you gather about Martha’s disposition from these verses?
- What can you gather about Mary?
- Do you identify more with Mary, with Martha, or with neither? Why?
- Some observers have commented that Mary and Martha simply have different, innate personalities, and that Martha is more active while Mary is more contemplative. What do you make of this idea? What would you say about its accuracy in light of Jesus’ remarks here?
- In vv. 41-42, Jesus implies that “indeed only one” thing is needed. What do you think he is talking about? What is the one thing?
- Songwriter Allen Levi sings, “It’s hard to be a Mary in a Martha’s world.”
 - How often does your life resemble Martha’s frenzied, busy activity here? Is it hard for you to stop the activity or easy?
 - Are there good things which distract you from the best thing?
- How often do you do what Mary did in this passage?
- On Sunday we learned **to welcome Jesus is to be with him in friendship and submission to his words**. Discuss:
 - What does this statement mean, given that we don’t actually have Jesus present in the flesh to sit at his feet?
 - Talk about the ways that you have found to cultivate this friendship with Jesus.
 - Do you feel that your life rhythms, as they pertain to this idea, are currently healthy, or do they need to be modified?

2. Pastor Josh said that we can also see something in this story about the welcome that Jesus extends: **his welcome shatters our categories and offers a new, defining center for our lives.**

- The “new, defining center” refers to letting our identity flow out of our friendship with Jesus. That friendship, rather than our activity or our labels, defines us. To what degree would you say that your friendship with Jesus is the defining center of your life? If that’s not the case, what would you honestly say occupies that place currently?
- This point stems from the way that Jesus elevates Mary, a woman, as the exemplary model of being his disciple.
 - What do you remember about the place of women in ancient Jewish culture? Would they ever be allowed to sit at the feet of a rabbi and learn with the men?
 - What do you know about Jesus’ interactions with women in other instances?
 - What is striking about Jesus’ treatment of Mary in this story, with respect to her gender and the society’s norms based on that label?
- In what ways do labels or categories hinder our relationships within the church family?
- In what ways do our concerns about labels or categories hinder our ability to introduce people to Jesus? What do you think this story has to say about this hindrance?
- Pastor Josh claimed the following: *“Jesus calls us to a better aim: to extend the invitation of friendship with him to people across every category—and especially to those on the margins of society—rather than be concerned about their labels or boxes. When they meet him, we let them be re-defined by the new identity that he gives, even as we are being re-defined by that new identity. In some cases, he may change some of those characteristics that fit in the labels. In others, he may grow a person as his disciple within those characteristics.”*
 - Do you agree or disagree?
 - Try to think of a time when Jesus welcomed someone from a “category” that made them an outcast, and then asked them to leave the lifestyle that put them in that category. Now think of a time when Jesus welcomed someone from a category that made them an outcast, and allowed them to remain as such.
- Charlie Drew writes, *“We must be, in how we conduct ourselves with each other, a living alternative to contempt. We must be sociologically inexplicable, and for that reason a winsome invitation to our angry and cynical neighbors to take a serious look at the person we call Lord.”*
 - How are we doing (you, your small group, our church) at being a “winsome invitation...?”
- In what other way(s) do you feel challenged by this story?

Sharing and Prayer:

- Share about any prayer needs you may have. Pray for one another based on those needs and what has been shared throughout your meeting.