

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

While I was in seminary I had the opportunity to lead the Lower Susquehanna Synod's Women's retreat with a classmate. My friend Susan and I spent a great deal of time thinking and planning. The women in Lower Susquehanna Synod had come up with a three year theme entitled, Listen, God is Calling. Looking at what had been done the two years prior in this theme we thought and prayed about what God was calling us to do. Finally, we decided that we would have a retreat about making time for God in our busy lives. We decided to do this because in much of our correspondence with the women in charge of making all of the arrangements it was a frequent theme to hear that many women would only come on Saturday because that's all of the time that they had, or that some would come Friday and leave Saturday afternoon or other scheduling arrangements. So we were set, the retreat Taking Time for God in our Busy Lives was set in motion. On Friday evening, everyone arrived in costume b/c it was Halloween weekend. After we laughed at each other and guessed what biblical person we were, we began our weekend with the story about Mary and Martha from the gospel of Luke.

Martha welcomed Jesus into her home and began getting things ready. We can imagine that she was most likely fixing a meal, maybe tidying up a bit. She was just busy with other things and was very distracted. Her sister, Mary on the other hand, sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him talk. After some time Martha was aggravated with her sister and asked Jesus if he cared that her sister had left her to do all of the work since he arrived. Martha was probably hoping that Jesus would tell Mary to help her. I'm sure that Jesus' response wasn't what she expected. I doubt that Martha wanted to hear Jesus tell her that she was too distracted with other tasks and that her sister's decision to sit and listen to Jesus' words was the better decision.

At the women's retreat, we talked about this passage. Susan and I received a variety of statements about the text. Some of the women stated that they could understand where Martha was coming from. They thought that Jesus' response might have been a little harsh. It's easy to pick on Martha for doing things. Others could see Jesus' point about Mary's decision to sit and listen. They saw a balance between listening and doing. With the views on this text out in the open, all of the women gathered came to the conclusion that this text about Mary and Martha could teach us some things about balancing our time in our lives. There are times for chores, but more importantly, there are times for God.

Last week we heard the parable of the Good Samaritan. It had a very different outcome than the story of Mary and Martha. I think it is good to look at them both together. Last week, Jesus told the parable and at the end told the lawyer to go and show mercy to others. This week, Jesus tells Martha, in not so many words, to sit and to listen. Both "go and do" and "sit and listen" are important for us in our lives as disciples.

There are times when we are called to go out into the world and do what God calls us to do: to share his love with other people, to seek justice and peace, and to help others. But there are also times that we need to sit and listen: to pray, to dive deep into God's word.

This past week at vacation bible school, we dove deep into God's word. Our children learned five words and five key verses to help them remember what God calls them to do. These five words of discipleship that they learned are: care, help, trust, believe, and listen. Through different Bible stories, our children were reminded of these five words as they go out into the world as disciples of Christ. They learned that there are times when God's people should care for others. Times when we should help others. Times when we need to trust Jesus. We believe in Jesus. He performed miracles; he helped the sick and the suffering and he died on the cross and was raised from the dead. We learned that there are times that we need to stop and listen to what God is telling us.

Disciples are called to do many things. There are times when we are to take action and go and do. But there are also times when we are to sit and listen.

Fred Craddock, author of the Luke Interpretation commentary reminds us that: "There is a time to go and do; there is a time to listen and to reflect. Knowing which and when is a matter of spiritual discernment. If we were to ask Jesus which example applies to us, the Samaritan or Mary, his answer would probably be Yes."

Now the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.