**Luke 10:38-42**

**The Better Service**

Some of you here are the kind of people who have a clean house 24/7. Dishes are always done; floors are always polished; blankets are perfectly folded and throw pillows are at the perfect angle on the couch. Some of you here are the kind of people that have a clean house once a month for about an hour. The second the toys are finally picked up, a riveting game of relocating everything begins; or right after the mop brushes the floor, the crumbs on the counter fall right behind it. No matter what you do, the house always feels messy. Obviously, some of you are caught in the middle, and I don’t want it to seem as though one way is better than another, but no matter where you and your house fall in line on the spectrum of cleanliness, there’s something that brings us all together as equals: visitors. And I bet you’d be surprised to see that whether your house is always clean or always messy, the average person will think the same thing—we’ve got a lot of work to do to prepare this place for guests. That’s what’s going through our friend Martha’s mind this morning. In Martha’s mind, she needed to go above and beyond in her service to these very special visitors.

Martha has your average person’s approach to hospitality and hosting. You make preparations worthy of the visitors you have coming. And then you serve the people under your roof. And you know what? She does it well. We aren’t given all the details, but I think it’s safe to assume that Jesus and his disciples had food to eat and a place to rest and relax. But notice the detail Luke includes in his account: **But Martha was distracted with all her serving.** When we think of things that distract us, we often have surface-level thinking. When you’re talking with someone but you’re both distracted by a loud bang, you look around to see what happened and then go back to your conversation. When you’re on the highway and traffic slows down, but when you get further along you don’t see anything on your side of the highway, and everyone’s slowing down to look at the accident on the other side of the highway—it’s distracting, but then everyone keeps moving forward. We tend to think distractions are something that disrupt us for a moment, and then we move on. That’s not how Jesus would define distraction. No, the type of distraction that Martha is facing is one that literally pulls her away from where she needs to be. This distraction has not only turned her head away from where she needs to look, but it has also caused her to walk in that opposite direction.

Did you catch what the distracting is? The distraction is the thing we commend Martha for, that we would commend any host for—good service. She dropped everything so that she could serve Jesus and his disciples to the fullest and Luke goes and calls that service a distraction! Remember what we said about distractions—they lead us the wrong way. If distractions lead us in the wrong direction, then distractions lead us away from where we need to be or go. And that was Martha’s problem. She took this really good thing—serving Jesus—and she made it the most important thing. Being a servant became more important than just being present with her Savior. Martha recognized that her relationship with Jesus was important, but she didn’t realize the most important part of building and maintaining that relationship—Jesus has to be the one to do the maintenance. Jesus has to be the one who strengthens his relationship with you, because there is nothing on planet earth, no amount of service that you can do to better your relationship with your Savior—he does that work for you! The saving always comes before the serving. The listening always comes before the action. I’m guilty of this as many pastors are: we throw around words like justification and sanctification around like they’re easy concepts to grasp; they’re not. But these are the technical terms for what’s being focused on by Mary who wants to listen to Jesus and Martha who wants to serve him. Martha’s putting the cart before the horse.

**Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is needed.** I imagine Martha’s hair is all frizzy, her apron is covered in flour, she’s huffing and puffing, and she commands Jesus to make her sister help. But then Jesus comes up and simply says, Martha, Martha, you’re getting ahead of yourself. You need to be served by me before you do your serving. The justification, the forgiveness of sins that Jesus is proclaiming to the world, comes before the sanctification, or the Christian life, the Christian service. Jesus’ service to you needs to come before anything else. It has to—it’s not an option. Your relationship with your Savior is the most important relationship that you have. I’ve been saying that since I became a pastor, I’ll say it until the Lord calls me home—no relationship you have is more important. Relationships go both ways. You serve me; I serve you; we both get served. But Jesus says, **Mary has chosen the better part.** Mary has first chosen to sit at the foot of her Savior and be served by him. Notice, you don’t have a single human relationship that works this way. Our relationships with other people look like two people sitting at a table making mutual agreements to talk, and meet, and support each other in different ways, but the maintenance of the relationship is dependent on both parties doing their service faithfully. Mary has chosen the better part—Mary has recognized that Jesus’ service to her is greater than her service to Jesus. **One thing is needed.** Before I get to serve my God, he needs to serve me, and that is exactly what he does in his Son. We’re not just talking about basic service either. It’s not a free trial and then you come back later to pay for the luxury package. No, full service. Mary sits at Jesus’ feet and listens to him say “I am headed to Jerusalem to die for you. I’m headed into a den of lions to save you from your sin.”

The service that Martha was distracted by wasn’t bad. We read about this and think to ourselves, Martha was a bad girl—No, she just got her priorities mixed up. She really idolized her service over her Savior. And this is the tricky part about idolatry—it’s not always bad stuff that pulls us away or distracts us from our Savior. It’s often good stuff! Think about the service that you do for your God and for your neighbor. Proper Christian living is something commanded by God and commended by people, but it does not replace the service that God needs to give you. Because if your Christian life isn’t first and foremost rooted in the Cross of Christ, then your service does not have a proper, long-lasting footing. If I ever put my service to God and his people above God’s service to me in Jesus, my service will be garbage. Anything that gets between me and my Savior is not worth it, even if that person getting in the way is myself and my desire to serve.

Only when we have first been serviced by God do we have what we need to serve God and his people. Only when we are regularly served by our Savior are we prepared to serve God and his people. See, the ability to serve with love and faithfulness isn't found inside of you, it’s not found inside of me, it’s found inside of Christ. What happens when you don’t get your car serviced? It won’t be serving you very long—it will for a while, but not forever. What happens when you let the weeds take over the garden? You might enjoy the early fruit, but that garden won’t be providing fruit longterm. What happens if we allow anything to get between us and the service our God desires to give? We may be able to serve for a while, but that service will dwindle, we’ll lose motivation, we may even go find something better to do with our time, but it will not be a service rooted in Jesus. Be in God’s Word where promises to serve you richly. This has a very direct impact on our congregation this morning as we install our leaders—leaders that you have elected to serve you, the church, and the community. That service needs to always be rooted in Jesus’ service to them, which means they need to be served through His Word and sacrament regularly. You as members need the same regular service, because you have a call as the church God has planted in Marinette to make Jesus known to everyone around—but you need to be constantly serviced by Jesus in His Word. He wants to serve you with his Word, his body and blood given for you on the cross, in Bible Studies where you better learn and understand what he promises you. They’re not just for when you’re bored or don’t have other things going on. No, those are the opportunities through which Jesus desires to serve you.

There is one thing that you need more than anything else in the whole world. There is one relationship that needs to be maintained more than any other relationship you will ever have. You’re one thing needed is Jesus. Your most important relationship—Jesus. The better service—Jesus’ service to you. And only when you are regularly served by your Savior and his forgiveness, are you properly prepared to serve him. Amen.