

**Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – July 21, 2013**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Luke 10:38-42**

**As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39) She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40) But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" 41) "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42) but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

**One thing's needful; Lord. This treasure/ Teach me highly to regard.  
All else, though it first give pleasure, Is a yoke that presses hard.  
Beneath it the heart is still fretting and striving,  
No true, lasting happiness ever deriving.  
This one thing is needful; all others are vain --  
I count all but loss that I Christ may obtain.**

The words of this hymn are a beautiful reminder of the fact that in spite of all of the many important things in life one thing stands head and shoulders above the rest. This is a reminder which we can use on an almost daily basis to help keep our lives properly focused.

This hymn was written about 300 years ago by John Schroeder – a Lutheran pastor in Germany. Six months after he was ordained as a pastor, his wife died and shortly after that at the age of 32, he was called to his eternal home after serving as a pastor for only three years. The life of John Schroeder and his early death together with the words of this hymn certainly show us that there is indeed only one thing which is truly needed. When we pause to ask ourselves, “Who knows how near my end may be?” we can’t help but be convinced that so many of the things that we fret and strive after aren’t important at all in the light of eternity and that the one thing that we need in this life is to sit at Jesus’ feet to hear his word and to learn from that word how we may obtain everlasting life.

Today as we reflect on the words of the hymn we’ve just sung together with the words of our text may the Holy Spirit firmly impress this fact on our hearts:

**Theme:** Only One Thing is Needed

**On the basis of this text we’ll discover the answer to question 1) “What is it?” and we’ll also be reminded that 2) those who have it are truly blessed.**

Quite frankly as Christians we all know what the one thing needed is. If it weren’t for the influence of the devil, our sinful flesh and our society we would not need to even deal with the question, “What is the one thing needful?” It’s not a difficult thing for Christians to agree that the most important thing we can do is to hear Jesus’ word and to believe it unto everlasting life. I pray that there is not a single one of you who doesn’t believe this. But even though we know this and believe it, we still may have difficulty expressing this truth in our lives. We don’t always live as if the word is the one thing we need. Like Martha we often become distracted, upset about many things and worried.

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If someone would have asked Martha, “What is the one thing which she needed in this life?” she most likely would have responded by saying that Jesus offered her everything she needed. But Martha acted the way you and I often act – we know that Jesus offers us all we need – yet we often forget this as we get caught up in our daily routines. That’s why even Christians need to be reminded to apply the lesson of our text so that they don’t let the things of this world get in the way of concentrating on the word of Christ and the salvation which is offered in that word.

If you and I were personally acquainted with Martha we’d be impressed with her practical and sensible approach to her Christian faith. (The only black mark on her record would be the rebuke which Jesus spoke to her in our text.) Martha clearly loved the Lord Jesus and when he came to her house, she was most eager to make him feel right at home. **As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.**

From the Gospel accounts we know that Martha, her sister Mary and their brother Lazarus had a close relationship with Jesus. Jesus even raised Lazarus from the dead after he had been in the grave for 4 days. When Jesus came to her house Martha was glad to see him.

Is that how we would we react if Jesus came to our house? Would we be glad he had come? Or would we be caught off guard? Would we have to quickly turn off the TV or radio or switch to a station that would not offend him? What books or magazines or games might we try to hide from his sight? Would we have to make a search for and dust off our copy of his Word? Would we have to warn our children and friends to watch what they say and to avoid some of their normal topics of conversation? Would we be as happy to see Jesus as Martha was? What would you do to make him feel welcome?

Martha not only welcomed Jesus but she wanted to make his stay as pleasant as possible and so one of the things she did was to prepare a meal for the Lord and his disciples. It must have been lots of work and a fair amount of expense but she didn’t have any complaints about these things. She was happy to do this for the Lord but she was a bit miffed with her sister since Mary wasn’t just as willing to help with these dinner preparations as she was.

We can learn some valuable lessons from Martha. If each of us was willing to take the initiative to work for the Lord, the church would surely accomplish many more things. If each of us would be willing to act without regard for the expense just as Martha did just to show our love for the Lord – just think of the positive impact that would have on the efforts of our congregation and our church to spread the truths of God’s word. Martha went to tremendous bother and expense to prepare a meal for the Lord and those disciples who were with him as an expression of her love for Jesus. She wanted to make his stay in her home as pleasant as possible because she loved the Savior. We could also learn from Martha not to rush into judging others just because they aren’t serving the Lord in the way we would expect them to.

Mary forgot all about the housework and the dinner when Jesus came. Honestly we might be inclined to think of Mary as being a bit scatter-brained and not real practical. Some might even think of her as being selfish or lazy. As far as she was concerned, dinner could come later – she had other things on her mind. We are told that while Martha busied herself with the distractions of preparing a meal that Mary sat at Jesus’ feet listening to what he had to say. Pastor Schroeder’s hymn described the scene this way:

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**How were Mary's thoughts devoted Her eternal joy to find  
As intent each word she noted, At her Savior's feet reclined.  
How kindled her heart, how devout was its feeling,  
While hearing the lessons that Christ was revealing;  
All earthly concerns she forgot for her Lord  
And found her contentment in hearing his Word.**

From Martha we learned that it is indeed important to serve the Lord. When Christian fathers and mothers report to the office, the factory or their places of employment to do their work faithfully, when parents take care of their households and their children, when Christian children obey and serve their parents, they are all serving the Lord. And this is a good thing! When Christians assist with tasks in their local congregations like helping with Summer Bible Camp, cutting the grass, or serving in an of the many other ways that are vital to the on-gong ministry of a local congregation this is a good thing!.

But from Mary we learn that there is only one thing which is needed. That one thing is to hear Jesus' words when we have the opportunity. Dinner and company can wait – in fact anything can wait when we have the opportunity to hear and learn the word of our Savior to find hope and comfort for our hearts.

And the time to do this isn't just on those Sunday's when it's convenient. It wasn't the Sabbath – the regular day of worship when Mary sat at Jesus' feet to hear his word. If it had been Martha would also have been taking a rest from her labors to sit at Jesus feet. From Mary we can learn to take time to listen to Jesus' word whenever we have the opportunity even during middle of a busy week.

What a wonderful thing it would be if all of the families in our congregation would be here each week to listen to Jesus speak. But you know what would be even more wonderful? It would be more wonderful if in every one of the homes of the members of this congregation, the family members would set aside the chores and the dishes and the Bible would be brought out and a portion of the Scriptures would be read by one of the members of the family. How wonderful it would be if each family made use of the Meditations booklet or some other devotional booklet on a daily basis. To know the word of God and to learn from it the way of eternal life through Jesus the Savior is the one thing we need. And if we are ready to admit that then we ought also to be ready to act on that knowledge by putting first things first in our routines.

Those who put this knowledge into practice in their lives as Mary did, will be richly blessed on account of it. The hymnist summed up the blessings of hearing the word in this way: **All earthly concerns she forgot for her Lord And found her contentment in hearing his Word.**

There truly is nothing in this world which brings us more blessings than hearing the words of our Savior. When Martha forgot that she became worried and upset about many things. She wasn't content and her life was filled problems. As an example the fact that the dinner she was preparing was so important to her made her quarrel with the sister she loved. How often hasn't something like that happened in our lives? When we begin to place too high of a value on our earthly concerns, we end up quarrelling and arguing with those we love.

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Martha's complaints earned her the rebuke of her Savior. She was so sure that what she was doing was the right thing that she came to Jesus while he was talking to Mary and said "**Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!**" Most people would think that this was a reasonable request but Jesus made it very clear to her that she was concerned about matters that were comparatively unimportant and certainly much less useful. Her concerns were filling her life with troubles. There is very little real satisfaction in the things of this world.

Martha was overly concerned about doing something for the Lord Jesus, but Mary wanted to let the Lord do something for her. What you do for the Lord is much less valuable and important than what the Lord can do for you. Instead of boasting that you love Jesus, rejoice that Jesus loves you!

Jesus told Martha and us: **only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.** The most important thing in the world is to learn of Jesus and the salvation he has prepared for us. Jesus once drove this point home by asking the question: (Luke 9:25) **What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?**

Everything in this world will eventually be taken away from us. There's only one thing that will never be taken from us is the salvation which comes through faith in Christ Jesus. A meal such as the one that Martha was preparing would have only a short term benefit. But hearing God's Word provides an eternal benefit. For it is through that word and only through that word that faith is worked in our hearts. (Romans 10:17) **Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.**

Hearing the word remains important once we have come to faith as well. Paul reminded the Thessalonians and us that it is God's word which continues to work in the hearts and lives of those who believe. That word gives us hope and comfort when we like Martha are bothered and troubled by many things. It assures us that through the blood of our Savior our sins have been washed away and that through the merits of Jesus everlasting life is assured to us. It also reminds us that since God was willing to sacrifice his son for us we can be confident that he will also provide us with everything else we need. (Romans 8:32) **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** It's no wonder we properly speak of the salvation Jesus won for us as the one thing we need as the hymnist reminds us in a verse which is not found in our hymnal:

**Will you find this one thing needful,  
Turn from all created things  
Unto Jesus and be heedful  
Of the blessed joy He brings.  
For where God and man both in one are united,  
With God's perfect fullness the heart is delighted;  
There, there, is the worthiest lot and the best,  
My One and my All, my Joy and my Rest.**

We who have found this one thing needful in our Savior will also want to share this with others. Still today the one thing which all men need is the message of a Savior from sin. May God grant that we truly find Jesus as the one thing we need and then may we gladly go out and share these blessings with

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the lost and the helpless who have not yet discovered the one thing they need the most – the message of salvation through Jesus' blood. Amen.