

Sermon for Pentecost XI Year C 2025
Martha, Martha . . .

Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted about many things.
Given everything that has been going on in the world
and in the lives of people we love in our family of faith,
I'd say these words from Jesus in the gospel today just might be the
gospel understatement of the year!

Many things have left Martha feeling troubled, anxious, and disturbed.
She's being pulled in different directions.
Her life is in pieces, divided into parts.
It's as if there are a thousand different things
in her heart and on her mind
and she's not able to give time, energy and attention
to the "one thing" needed.
Maybe she doesn't even know what that "one thing" is.

There are times and days when, like Martha, I am
"worried and distracted by many things."
What about you?
Chances many of us are living a Martha kind of life.
It's often what happens when we feel overwhelmed
and the plumb line of our life is swinging wildly.

And yet . . . there is so much to distract us, to worry us.
So much that divides our lives into competing parts.
Many things and messages that pull us in different directions.

Recently I had to shake my head as I read one of the highway signs the
State so helpfully puts up with messages—
This one read: *Don't be a distracted driver. Put your phone down.*
Now, on the one hand I agree about putting your phone down when you
drive but . . . don't these signs also provide a distraction to drivers?

And yet . . . it's true.
We are all distracted drivers.
It's how we are living.
We are making our way through life with distractions.
It's not just dangerous, it's exhausting.

Martha is a distracted driver.
It's not a criticism of her.
When Jesus says to her,
Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things,
we need to keep in mind that this is Jesus—her Good Shepherd—
who is talking to her.
He's not making an accusation so much as he's making an observation.
As the Good Physician, he's making a diagnosis not judgment.

And when he says, "Mary has chosen the better part,"
I don't think he is opposing Mary
(who is sitting at his feet and listening)
to Martha (who is worried and distracted with tasks).
I don't think he is saying, Mary is right and you, Martha, you are wrong.
And . . .
No, I don't think he was saying it is better to sit at his feet and listen
than it is to prepare the house and table to welcome a guest.

Look at the life of Jesus.
He lives on a Mary-Martha spectrum, as do we all.
Sometimes Jesus went off by himself to be alone, silent and still;
to sit, pray and listen, to be present to his Father.
Other times Jesus was active, on the move, in the midst of people,
and busy teaching, healing, feeding 5000.
One is not better or more important than the other.
We need both.

So Jesus isn't making a value judgment on the things that are distracting Martha.
He's recognizing what those distractions are doing to her.
It might be helpful to think of the word distraction as two words hyphenated: dis-traction as in the loss of traction.
When we're distracted by many things we lost traction—our wheels are spinning, but we're not getting anywhere.
There's a lot of wasted effort and energy in spinning your wheels.

So how do you get out of spinning your wheels,
get back your lost traction?
Is it being more focused?
Rearranging your schedule, cutting down on the old "to do" list—you know work smarter not harder?
Is it self-medicating, avoiding, or complaining that others aren't doing their share of the work?

Martha thinks if Mary would just help, get up and so some work, everything would be better.
She sees her distractions as her circumstances.
Guess what, you and I often do too.
But Jesus doesn't address the circumstances, he addresses Martha.
The distractions are not about what is happening around her but what is happening within her.
Her many tasks have divided her into many parts.

What if the opposite of and antidote to distraction isn't focus, working harder or paying more attention but traction.
Traction is what lets us move forward and get somewhere.
Maybe that's what Jesus is talking about when he says, "There is need of only one thing."
And what if we gain traction when we choose "the better part"?

To have traction, you need to be on a firm surface—a firm foundation.
Wheels spin when we are in slippery conditions—
like muck and mud and chaos.
So I suspect that when Jesus said that “there is need of only one thing”
he might as well have been saying to Martha,
“Peace. Be still.”

If I have discovered or learned any wisdom in my journey of faith,
it’s letting God get a word in edgewise.
Gaining traction is about building a firm foundation
by holding onto Jesus’ words of grace, redemption and love to us
and for us—in any and all circumstances.

It’s fortunate that we have the story of Abraham and Sarah
alongside this gospel story of Mary and Martha.
It’s a reminder that when we share hospitality with God—
important and life changing messages are given.
Just imagine if Sarah started complaining about making all those cakes
Abraham had her bake—would she have even heard the words that
would change her life . . . and the life of the world?

But most of all, we are reminded in the story of Abraham and Sarah
that when God shows up, even the impossible is made possible.
We can move forward with the traction or foundation of faith
in God’s promise.
But we need to listen, to hear the words.
So let us now listen carefully to what Jesus has to say to us Marthas
today: *You are distracted and worried about many things.*
There is need of only thing . . . choose the better part,
which will not be taken away from you.

Amen.