

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
July 25, 2010
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

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. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 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!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (NIV)

What do we need? I suppose the answer to that question might change as we go through life and as situations change. Little children might say they need their bottle or their mommy. Students may say they need a loan. The last few days anyone out in this heat might have made it clear that they needed a big glass of cold water. The person who has been working hard might get some rest on a vacation, come back, and remark: *"I really needed that."*

But what do we really need? Anyone who works to set up a balanced budget at home knows the challenge of figuring out the difference between our needs and our wants. It is true that over the years some needs have remained pretty constant, such as food and drink, clothes and shelter. But isn't it also true that needs seem to be constantly changing? Things that never even once existed, such as cars or cell phones or insurance plans for all kinds of things, are now considered needs. It is the same with activities and schedules. You will hear people saying: *"I need to do this or I need to go here or I need to drop off my kids for this or that."* Our schedules quickly fill up with things we need to get done, don't they?

That is why this lesson from Luke's Gospel is such a wonderful reminder for you and me this morning and every morning. Jesus opens our eyes once again to see where our top priority ought to be and always remain. Listen carefully to God's Word this morning as we hear the answer to the question: **What do you really need?**

Jesus and his disciples come into a village where a woman by the name of Martha graciously opens her home to them. Bethany was a little village located two miles east of Jerusalem. Martha lived with her sister Mary and her brother Lazarus and their home became a friendly place where Jesus was always welcome. We know Jesus stopped here more than once on His travels to and from Jerusalem.

Now picture this scene. Martha invites Jesus and His disciples over for a meal. There are many preparations that need to be made to do it right. After all, this is a special guest who has arrived. So she needs to cook the food. She needs to prepare the drinks. She needs to clean. She needs to set up for the dinner to make sure everything is just right. But Martha is doing all the work by herself. That's because Martha *"had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said."* While Martha was doing all the work and taking care of all the things that needed to get done, Mary just sat there! She just sat there listening. She was more interested in what Jesus had to say than in helping out with the work of serving Jesus with food and drink. In fact, the original

language makes it clear that Mary was listening attentively to each word Jesus had to say. Put yourself in Martha's shoes and we can easily understand her frustration, can't we? All these things needed to get done and her sister just sat there. We read: "**Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him (Jesus) and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'**"

Dear friends, are we not all a little bit like Martha once in a while? Are we ever distracted by all the preparations that need to be made? Do we ever lose sight of the big picture? What do you really need? We need food and drink. We need to save up for our kids college or retirement. We need to meet the next deadline. We need to get our kids a step ahead. We need to do this. We have to do that. Even when it comes to serving the Lord and doing His work we can become easily distracted and frustrated. We might even say to our Lord: "*It sure would be nice to get some help around church here once in a while. I wish more people would realize that it takes more to keep this church going than to just come in for one hour a week sit there and just listen.*"

When we are there, distracted by all the things we need and frustrated by all the things we need to get done, we too have a Savior who comes with a loving reminder about what we really need. Please understand Martha was not doing anything wrong in serving Jesus. In love, she was trying to make a nice meal for Jesus and His disciples. Jesus doesn't rebuke her for selfish motives or scold her for going about things in a sinful way. Instead, Jesus gives her a gentle lesson about priorities. You see what Mary had decided to do was not wrong either. In fact, listen to what Jesus says: "**Martha, Martha,**" *the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things...Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."* Mary had chosen something even better than serving Jesus with a meal. She recognized Jesus as the One who came to serve her. She listened to Jesus. She hung on His every Word. She sat at the feet of her Lord listening attentively to all He had to say. Jesus said this is better. This will not be taken away from her.

How often don't you and I need this gentle, loving reminder! Martin Luther often commented that while all sin is abominable and damnable, it would be better for us to lapse into any other sin rather than that of contempt and neglect of the Word. He wrote: "**If we must stumble or sin, may God rather let us sink into all sorts of folly, if only we do not lose this Treasure, Christ in His Word. For this Treasure is the power that crushes the head of the devil. For this reason the devil is patient in all matters, can suffer all sort of things, can yield and make concessions except in this one article. For where the Word is not at work, he can beak in however and whenever he pleases. In brief, no holy life, piety, or wisdom avails anything against his might and power except this Word alone. Therefore our greatest care should be to keep from being torn away from it. For to do this is the devil's ambition, and he means to achieve it by the use of all his plans and power.**" (*What Luther Says* p. 1488)

Just think about what Luther writes here for a moment. Why would the devil work so hard to tear us away from the Word? Think of why the devil works to do everything in His power so that you do not sit at Jesus' feet listening attentively to His Words. Why does the devil want to fill up our lives with so many things so that there is no time for church, no time for Bible study, no time for personal at home reading and studying the Word of God? Because the devil knows that in this Word is One who frees

us from sin and his control over us. In this Word is Jesus who saves us from death and hell. Here in this Word we find the Savior who kept the law for us and the Savior who suffered and died on the cross to pay for our sins. In this Word we find what Martha and Mary found - the Resurrection and the Life - so that all who believe in Him will live even though they die. In this Word we find a message of peace and forgiveness and life in Jesus.

Someone once said that: *"A man may go to heaven without riches, without honor, without learning, without friends, but he can never go there without Jesus Christ."* This, my friends, is what makes God's Word what you and I really need. In fact listen again to what Jesus says: ***"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed."*** Go ahead and make a list of all your needs - it seems to get longer and larger all the time. Think of all the things we say we need and all the things we say we need to do. Jesus simply says there is one thing, that's right one thing, that is needed! Take your list of things you need and need to do and rip it up and then put on it the one and only thing you need above all else - God's Word. That's the proper priority Jesus teaches us to have in our lives.

Look carefully at this wonderful account of Mary and Martha and answer the question: What do you really need? While you need bread to eat, that physical bread is not as important as feeding on the Word which is Bread of life. While you need water to drink it is more vital to regularly drink from the living waters of His Word. While you need clothes for your body and a house for shelter, even more you need the robe of Jesus' righteousness and a place to call home for all eternity. While we may need the rest a vacation brings, it can't compare to the rest Jesus brings to know that all our sins are forgiven. Jesus says it best when he tells us not to worry for our heavenly Father knows that we need food and drink and clothes, but because we need something more important He teaches us to ***"seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"*** (Matthew 6:33).

So while we have many things we still need to do, there is one thing above all else that is worthy of our time. There is only one thing that is needed. This is the one thing we need no matter our age or how our situations change. God's Word is what we all need for this Word is the one place we find Jesus our Savior. It is the place we get to hear our Savior speak to us and guide us through this life. Choose what is better and it will not be taken from you. Amen.