

Sermon: 9th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 10: 38 – 42 (v.42a)

Theme: Welcoming the Lord

Goal: We welcome the Lord in our life/home by listening to His Word + receiving the Sacrament, and by serving Him without complaining.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: This story brings tenseness between deeds and faith. When we look at our church life, we praise the active women who are always ready to help and to do something; we praise Martha! But Jesus rebuked Martha and praised Mary, who was quietly seated at Jesus feet listening to His words. What was wrong?

I – Hospitality/deeds

Martha had opened her home to Jesus and to His disciples and she was busy preparing food for the Twelve plus Jesus and maybe for some more guests. This was a refreshing time for the group always on the way, never knowing where they would sleep and eat. Martha and her siblings Mary and Lazarus had a Villa in Bethany near Jerusalem, and it seems that they were very well related people to Jerusalem's high society, as we can read in the episode when Lazarus was raised from the dead (John 11). When Jesus and the disciples were honoured with a dinner in Bethany the day before the Triumphal Entry, Martha was serving at the tables, according to John 12:2.

Martha was practising a highly recommended deed in the Bible: hospitality. The Old Testament reading told us when Abraham hosted the Lord and two angels who came to him to announce the birth of Isaac, the promised son. The letter to the Hebrews, recalling this event and some others in the Old Testament, says: "Do not

forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2).

Hospitality was especially necessary when the first Christian Church was persecuted and Christians had to flee from one city to another; and they were in need of a shelter. The Apostle Paul recommends: “Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality”

(Romans 12:13). And Peter wrote: “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9).

Each of us likes to enjoy hospitality, a good dinner, a pleasant chat. One of FELSISA’s Core Values is ‘*Welcoming*’ (the other two are *Trusting* and *Caring*; we talked about *Caring* last week, when the Parable of the Good Samaritan was the Gospel of the day). ‘*Welcoming*’ our visitors and our members in the church, as a big family, is one of our permanent goals.

Martha was doing everything for the welfare of Jesus and of the disciples. What was the problem that Jesus rebuked Martha and said: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things”?

II – Listening/ Faith

On the other hand, Mary was seated at Jesus’ feet, quietly, listening to what He was saying. This is what we do when we come to the Service: We sit, we listen, we sing, we praise, we go to the Lord’s Supper. Jesus calls this the best part when He said: “But only one thing is needed. Mary had chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.”

It was a very special occasion for Mary to listen to Jesus. The Master was always surrounded by crowds of people and it was difficult for her to find some quiet time just to listen. And Mary enjoyed it a lot! She was drinking directly from the fountain of living water. She was

not concerned about whatever was happening around her. For her, it was a matter of priority and of opportunity. When again would she have this opportunity to be so close to Jesus and to listen to His teachings of life?

We have to value highly our Service hour as a quiet time with Jesus. We need it! We have six days in the week for work, for shopping, for taking care of our home and whatever more we need to do. We even have the Sunday afternoon to rest and to visit friends and relatives. But the time Jesus comes to this house to proclaim His Gospel and to offer His Body and Blood in the Holy Sacrament is a unique privilege we have. Many are not aware of this privilege and despise this chance to meet Jesus and to listen to His Words. He wants to come to our homes as well and to have a quiet time with us and our family at devotional and prayer time. Of course Jesus is always with His children, 24 hours per day; but we have to be aware of these special moments of quiet time with Jesus, when He shares His love and His forgiveness with us.

Martha didn't take time for Jesus. But, in spite of her hustles and bustles, she was a woman of faith. When her brother Lazarus had died, she confessed boldly to Jesus: "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:27). What was the problem then?

III – The problems

We can say that there are two major problems that we need to be aware of to avoid taking the same wrong way and repeat the error:

Firstly, it is a matter of priority. "Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made" and she didn't take time to listen to Jesus. The Africa Bible Commentary says: *We are called first to*

listen to the Word of God and on that basis we are urged to engage in social and other services. What Jesus disapproves of is the way in which Martha goes about her work, with fuss and agitation. We do not need to separate the gentle, listening, self-surrendering Marys and the pragmatic, busy Marthas. In other words, the Mary in me ought not to repress the Martha, and the Martha in me ought not to repress the Mary (ABC 1226). The very active men and women in the church shall not feel themselves guilty when they do what they do. It's a blessing for the church to have 'Marthas' who like to work according to their skills. As James wrote: "Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says!" (James 1:22).

Secondly, Martha complained of her sister. She was grumbling against Mary... and this is not good. Jesus didn't like it and rebuked Martha, and Jesus still doesn't like it when it happens among us...and it happens so often... With repentance we have to search for God's forgiveness, listen to His Words of love.

Conclusion: This well-known story of Martha and Mary shall not discourage any one who likes doing and does work of love in the church and in the society, serving Jesus and serving his neighbour as Martha did. We know that this is the will of God. Rather, it shall encourage each of us to seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33), welcoming the Lord in our lives and filling our lives with the love of Jesus to be then really able to love and to serve our fellows with all our heart. The more we sit at the Lord's feet to listen to His Words and the more we come to His Table believing that our sins are forgiven by His blood shared for us on the cross, the more will we be able to work and to be active in His Church and around us, shining our faith in Jesus to the world through our good deeds. Amen.