

KGL+
Sermon
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be always acceptable in your sight, O God our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

It's funny that the one time there is a story focusing on the women following Jesus in scripture, that they are seemingly pitted against each other. Not funny, haha, but rather funny, as in, Lord Almighty, this again? This is what we get? Followed by a deep sigh.

Apparently, there is nothing so appealing to the voyeur's gaze than the perceived discord between other people and within their families, and I might add, especially between women. It's a genre unto itself in television shows alone. Perhaps because it gives others a glimpse into the fallible lives of others, especially the parts we often desire to keep away from the public gaze. How many of us here have gotten into an argument over responsibilities with a sibling, partner, spouse, friend? How many of us have shushed those conflicts the minute we were in the presence of others?

The fact that the conflict arises between Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus, who is still unnamed and unmentioned in today's gospel, by the way, holds weight in a canon of scripture where women are rarely mentioned, and certainly not given full attention. The Gospel of Luke, more than any other gospel, includes the presence of women far more than the others—perhaps as a sign of Luke's overarching theology centering Jesus at the margins and regularly among those with less or no power in the social structure.

But Martha is not without power here. Jesus is visiting her house—not her husband's, nor her brother's. She welcomes Jesus and his followers to a meal, a sign not only of hospitality, but of intimacy—eating together in the culture and time of Jesus wasn't simply for sustenance or pro forma. It was a way to honor the guest, to uphold the tradition of hospitality to the stranger. And there is much to be done and Martha is feeling anxious.

I suspect that, gender aside, the majority of us have felt this way before.

And like Martha, I bet many of us have responded to that anxiety by responding clearly as adults should: by triangulating the heck out of it. “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.”

Cue the Kardashian theme music here. The drama is getting good.

I am not sure that Jesus helps a whole lot in this case—I don't know that he's actually the expert here at the housekeeping minutiae of hospitality work, no matter that he is both God and human—Jesus, the Son of God, doesn't strike me as someone who cared about the state of his

kitchen when guests were expected. But he does call out the actual issue at hand. And that, friends, is where the Lord does the Lord's work very well.

“Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things...” Worried and distracted, friends. There is the crux of this passage.

If I took a straw poll here, even in this beautiful place on this beautiful day, my guess would be that there are at least 75% of you who are currently, as in during this sermon and service, worried and distracted. With the to-do lists in your head and in your planner; with your plans for the rest of the day carefully laid out, or with the anxiety because no distinct agenda awaits you, and that feels equally unnerving, perhaps as if you were missing out. It's possible that you are sitting here, wondering if you should be, or if something more is required of you, or it's possible that you are here because this is your duty on Sunday mornings—to show up, whether you feel like it or not, and find in that mandate a certain sense of agency. Maybe it's the state of the world, and maybe it's the state of your heart, but I bet that there is something going on within you, friends.

Martha is doing her work, and doing it as best she can. And her worry is that it won't be good enough. That she's the only one who cares about it. That she is not on a team with her sister, but that she alone is responsible for the welcome of the Lord and those who follow him into her home. It's possible that the work or situation of her sister, and the other disciples, looks easy compared to hers. Perhaps it is. But truth and equity in another's perception doesn't always hold, and to Martha, she is serving alone. And she feels it.

And her worry and anxiety turn to the dark side of service and serving others—it turns to resentment.

I do believe that there are a few keys sins that fallible humanity is prone to more than others—shame; and fear; and nestled in between those two, lies resentment.

Resentment comes around when one believes one's work is not valued and is taken for granted. It's the loneliest of feelings, and is yoked to one's sense of being treated unfairly—that others do not sense your own worth, whether you are actually right or not.

It lurks in our relationships, and you can hear the pain in Martha's voice—*she's* the only one who cares about the state of the house; *she's* the only one who values the role of hospitality; *she's* the only one who is actively doing something to welcome Jesus in. Others are not helping, and therefore not valuing what she offers to this ministry and mission.

While I may not fully rely on Jesus to understand the role of 1st century Palestine's hosting stresses on women, I do trust him to cut through to the heart of the matter. He is not gaslighting Martha by telling her that her sister is actually doing the right thing, no matter how deeply our sense of schadenfreude wants to see a sister 'catfight' occur. He cuts through to how she is feeling and names it—Martha, Martha—you are worried and distracted by many things.

Note the use of Jesus' call to Martha—he says her name twice. In scripture, a person is only called twice when they are invited to a new life, a new way of looking at their role vis a vis the

living God: Moses, Moses, at the burning bush. Abraham, Abraham, as he is about to sacrifice Isaac. Mary, Mary, at the Annunciation. Simon, Simon, as Peter is about to deny knowing Jesus. Martha, Martha.

You are worried and distracted. You have need of only one thing.

And what is the one thing Lord? we all whisper, as we lean into Jesus.

Just that, Jesus says to us. Lean into me.

Just that, Jesus says to us. I love you as you are.

Just that, Jesus says to us. Your worth is not tied to your ministry. Your worth is not tied to your success. To your efficacy and efficiency. It is not tied to the state of your house when guests arrive.

Your anxiety and worry do not honor me, Jesus says. To be wrapped up in them is to become isolated. And when we are isolated, we have need of only one thing: ourselves. And that is not of me and my Father, Jesus reminds us.

Our scripture isn't about the fight between two women, or how one is better than the other, which is how it has been portrayed for centuries, especially to keep women as 'learners' in the Church, rather than 'leaders'. Our scripture also isn't a 1st century version of 'Are you a Ginger or a Mary Ann', binary thinking, BuzzFeed quiz telling you if you are a Mary or a Martha—it is a dissolution of yoking what we do to our proximity to Jesus. We can consider ourselves right next to Jesus and still ignoring him and his words, like we would our parents when we were teenagers (or still do now).

The sin is not in the hospitality. The sin is in the resentment we can hold when we don't recall how beloved we are to God. How necessary, with our own sets of gifts and foibles and peccadillos, we are to God and God's world. The sin is in how we can steep in resentment until we are out of life, out of spoons, out of love, like a teabag used too many times until our service to God gets weaker and weaker, and ultimately you can't taste it at all.

And that is when God calls us by our name if we are able to hear it: Martha, Martha. It's time for new life. Sit with me for a moment. Remind yourself that you are not of the kitchen, nor of the ministry, but you are of God, and all that we do is an extension of that love—and not the other way around. Martha, Martha, God says to us. I can give you this new life. Trust me. Lay down your to do list and agenda for a moment. Martha, Martha, God says to us, this is not a competition for my approval. There is enough for all who call upon me, and even more for those who don't.

Church, church—God says to us. Be loved and be set free.

Amen and Amen.