

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 11)  
St. Luke 10:38-42

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

I have heard it said, "If we had a scheduled day, we would be able to get a lot more done in a day." That is to say that if everything—and I mean everything—that you needed to do were scheduled, you could and would get much more done. Whether or not that's the case, it is an indication that people these days have something to do at just about every hour of the day. There's barely time to sleep. It seems, and it just may be the case, that people today are a busy people, busier than ever.

Busyness interferes with leisure. When there's so much to do, there's little time for fun. As mentioned once already, busyness can also take away from time to sleep. But, busyness can also take time away from doing nothing, playing a game, reading a book for fun, enjoying some down time with friends, going to the pool, riding your bike to nowhere in particular...leisure.

Busyness can also take away time from worship. Therein lies a real danger. You can get so caught up in doing what you're "supposed" to do—taking care of business—that you forget about, ignore, or flat-out neglect worship. You can get the doctrine of vocation so wrong that you believe you are doing right when you miss worship because you are doing what you do.

That's the problem encountered in today's Gospel. Jesus and His disciples were in Bethany, and He was a guest at Mary and Martha's house. Martha invited Him in, expecting to serve Him. Certainly, she and Mary knew who Jesus was, but the text almost seems to indicate that a friendship between Jesus and this family had not yet developed. So, as Jesus made Himself comfortable in their house, Martha quickly got to the busy work of preparing and serving a meal fit for a great teacher. Mary, taking a bit of an unusual role, decided to bask in the glory of this teacher—learning at His feet.

Teaching is what Jesus does; "Faith comes by hearing," the inspired St. Paul wrote, so Jesus teaches and preaches the Word—He speaks the faith to and into people. Here, Luke didn't write what He was talking about; that's not the point of this narrative. What is important is what's going on. Jesus was in Martha and Mary's house teaching. Martha was busy preparing and serving a meal. Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet listening to Jesus.

Finally fed up with Mary, Martha approached Jesus and inquired demanding, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." "I'm very busy here, Lord. We're here to serve you, and my sister is doing nothing. Why don't you tell her to help me out?"

How similar that is to what goes on here. Jesus comes here to teach and to preach—to have the faith spoken to and into you. He does this through His called and ordained servants as they teach and preach His Word, pronounce absolution so valid it's as if it was done before God in heaven, wash sins away with water combined with Word, and place His body and blood hidden in bread and wine into the mouths of believers. And the people are sitting, standing, or kneeling there doing nothing—they receive. It doesn't look busy; it looks like leisure. How easy it is for any one to call out, "Hey, Lord, I'm a Christian, and I'm here to serve you. But, I can't do it alone. Look at all of these people sitting around doing nothing. Would you tell them to get up and help me out?"

It may be the same coin, but the other side of that is that church looks so much like a leisure activity that it only makes sense to attend if you have time. If I had a dollar for every time I heard, "We'd come to church more often, but we're just so busy..."

I found a quotation by Pr. Bill Cwirla that's appropriate for this situation:  
Increasingly, my parting word to members of our congregation during the week is "See 'ya Sunday." You expect me to be here on Sunday, and

I expect the same from you. Otherwise, there isn't much point in my being here. Not must use for a preacher unless there are hearers. I don't expect this of unbelievers. But I assume that people who love Jesus and trust Him for their life and salvation also enjoy being in His presence. And there is no greater Gospel presence of Jesus than in the Word and the Lord's Supper. It breaks my heart to hear people respond, "We'll see" or "Oh, I'm not sure if we'll be there." Try that line on your spouse. "I'm not sure if I'll be home tonight, dear."

"[T]here is no greater Gospel presence of Jesus than in the Word and the Lord's Supper." There is nothing better for a believer than to be where Jesus says He is for you to forgive you and give Himself to you—that is right here at His altar.

To quote from Star Trek, it was said by Captain Kirk that "if something's important [to you], you make the time [for it]." There is much truth in that saying. How sad that there are some Christians who don't find the Divine Service important enough to make time for it. How bold they are to say to God's face, "I don't know if I'll have the time to be in your sacramental presence that day." "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," the Law says. Luther taught, "We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it."

Or, to put it another way, Pr. Craig Donofrio once said that to help put it in context, he tells people to replace the word church in their excuse with what goes on at church. In other words, rather than saying, "I don't have time to go to church" or "I'm too busy to be at church," say, "I don't have time for the forgiveness of my sins" or "I'm too busy to have my sins forgiven."

Now, I don't mean to speak such Law against those whose God-given vocations keep them away on occasional Sunday mornings. There should also be no guilt on the part of those who cannot make it to the Divine Service because they are shut-in or happen to be hospitalized at the time. For one such as these, there are ample opportunities to be in the Word and receive their Lord apart from the Divine Service: from Wednesday evening Vespers and Lutheran Theology study to the Friday evening Bible Studies in this place, from communion in the home to private confession and absolution whenever it is desired. If you can't make it here on Sundays, talk to me! If you cannot legitimately make it to church at it's scheduled time, let me know and I can bring church to you!

No, this word of Law is spoken against those who show their spite of God's Word by choosing not to hear and receive it, especially veiled in the excuse of being too busy to hear it or having no time to hear it. It is a sin against the third commandment to despise preaching and the Word of God. This is done by not attending public worship, not using the written Word of God and the Sacraments, and using the Word of God and Sacraments negligently or carelessly.

It's so easy to become like Martha, especially when you feel like you're doing all the work and there are others around who are quite capable of pitching in, or when you feel so busy, but see a church filled with lazy people who do nothing more than sit around and receive. "Tell them to get up and help me out."

Jesus responded, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." I like to imagine that Jesus' tone is relaxed and laid-back as if to counter the harried pace that Martha has as she tried, alone, to serve Jesus. Jesus calms her down and, in essence, invites her to join her sister at His feet to learn from Him, to have a part in the good part with her. Dr. Arthur Just wrote Martha's dilemma can be highlighted by seeing it in the broader context of the instruction (catechesis) of Luke's gospel. ...[T]here are three elements to Jesus' table fellowship: teaching, eating, and the presence of Jesus. One shows hospitality to wandering missionaries in a variety of ways. One certainly provides for them the food that is

essential for *table* fellowship. But the most fundamental part of the hospitality shown to wandering missionaries is to receive and hear *the preaching of the kingdom*.

You see, there's nothing inherently wrong with serving your guests a meal, or even simply setting out some snacks and drinks before them. Nevertheless, the better thing "to do" is to sit at Jesus' feet and receive from him.

"The issue here is whether one is first to serve the Lord or first to be served by him," Dr. Just continued. It's an issue of merit and grace. To first serve the Lord is to seek by that service to please Him and earn His favor. To first be served by the Lord is to recognize that one cannot earn God's favor but that He freely gives it for the sake of His Son.

Again, from Dr. Just,

This is really a question of the proper approach to worship. Mary has the right liturgical theology. She sits at the feet of Jesus to receive divine service from him.

Therein is the reason why Lutherans call this the Divine Service. You are gathered here by God to be served by Him not to serve Him or offer Him anything. He takes your sin and gives you forgiveness; He takes your weakness of faith and strengthens it with His Word and Sacraments. Jesus went into the home of Mary and Martha not to be served by them, but to serve them—to proclaim to them that the Kingdom of Heaven had come near to them, that it was reclining right there at their table. There is no greater form of worship than to sit and receive grace from the hand of God.

Dear hearers, the Kingdom of Heaven is near to you, too. He is right here, serving you. He does not deny that you are busy; on the contrary, He acknowledges it and serves you in spite of it. He tells you, "Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10a) He graciously calms you,

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.  
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

"I will give you rest," Jesus says, "[L]earn from Me."

Dear hearers, here is the rest you desire—the rest you require. Harken to Jesus' words, leave your busyness at the door, sit at His feet, and learn from Him. Be still, listen to His Word, for in it you will find healing and life. The time here is but a moment, but the effect is an eternal lifetime. Here, for a moment, you receive your Lord and Savior, who died that you may live, so that you may be with Him for eternity. That's the "good part" from today's Gospel, and there is no better part. If your vocation or situation prevents you from being here for this set time, then the Kingdom of God can come near to you where you are, where you can be, when you can be; and at that time the Word once again bids you to "Be still" and He will give you rest.

Pr. Cwirla wrote, "Busy? Anxious? Stressed out? Don't just do something, sit there—at the feet of Jesus." For there at the feet of Jesus you hear these remarkable, peace- and rest-filled words: You are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.