Being a Mary in a Martha World

A Ladies Lunch devotional by Sue Holbrook, First Methodist Church, 2012

> *"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." Luke 10:41-42*

I'm taking the liberty today to skip ahead in the Book of Luke to the tenth chapter. I don't know why except that this is where the Lord is leading me with everything that's coming at me lately. I usually refer to myself as a speaker but today…there's nothing I can do but preach! I don't know if there's somebody here who especially needs to hear this today. Maybe it's me. This has really been laid on me. You know how there are times when one phrase or thought keeps coming at you from all sides and you finally get the message that…gee, I guess I better pay attention to that.

Well, sisters…the phrase…indeed the command…of the hour is "Be still and know that I am God." Everywhere I turn these days…from the mouths of my friends…the books I'm reading…even some things on tv which is a huge surprise…I'm hearing this repeated like a mantra. Be still…be still…be still…

Get to a quiet place, the world is telling me. Dr. Gerald Mann closes his book The Search for Inner Peace by saying: Go to a quiet place and simply ask God, What do you want me to do? And we have to be in a quiet place to hear him when he tells us. If you want to know about hearing from God, I recommend to you a book called…oddly enough…Hearing God by Peter Lord. It's available on Amazon. The entire book has one theme: Only one thing is necessary.

It's hard to be a Mary in a Martha world. Remember, Mary was the one sitting at the Master's feet while her sister, Martha, hustled around DOING. We live in a world that honors, indeed even reveres, activity. Have you ever heard anyone say to you "You're just sitting there on your fanny reading a book. Get up and DO something." Well, it just may not be the time for you to DO something. It could be that the most important thing you need to DO at that very moment is read and absorb the contents of that book. Especially if the book just happens to be the Bible. Have you ever heard another woman described as a mover and shaker…somebody who is always on the MOVE and gets things DONE? God bless her…I hope she doesn't burn herself out.

Remember that old poem: My candle burns at both ends, it will not last the night. But o my foes and o my friends, it gives a lovely light. Well, with apologies to Edna St. Vincent

Millay (who I understand did burn out her candle at a very young age with a whole lot of questionable activity) just living life in a tizzy is not the point. Burning the candle at both ends can have a pretty high price. I tell you that as one whose candle has sputtered over the years. In fact, a friend once gave me a wall plaque that said “Don’t tell me not to burn my candle at both ends…tell me where to get more wax.” There is a time to DO and there is a time to be still. Maturity is realizing there will never be enough wax. And the light will become less and less lovely.

Not only is it ok to sit quietly and read a book, it’s ok to just simply sit quietly. Just sit. We can’t turn off our mind, but we can turn down the volume enough so we can be still and hear God. Have you ever heard of fallow ground? That’s what it’s called when a farmer rotates his fields and leaves certain ones empty and unplanted for a season. He does that so the soil can replenish the nutrients and produce better crops later on when that field is planted again. Just the same way, our minds and spirits must be replenished by giving them time to go to the Creator and just rest and soak up the love. We desperately need to give ourselves permission to lie fallow for a season. There’s a big difference in just being lazy and being still in communion.

Jesus told Martha that only one thing was necessary. Only one thing…relationship with him. Mary had chosen the one thing and it would not be taken away from her. That’s huge…his promise that time spent with him will not be taken away from us. We’re not just sitting there doing nothing when we’re in communion with Jesus.

We have to be careful even in choosing good things to fill our time. There are so many good things that distract us from our personal prayer time and Bible time. Books by Christian authors, sermons by our pastors, Bible studies with our friends. All of these are good things and the well-balanced Christian life needs them in the proper proportions. But we must beware of allowing them to be substitutes. The trouble comes when we substitute reading a Beth Moore book for time spent in the Word itself. Or when we listen only to our pastor’s interpretation of God’s word instead of our own in depth study. It’s all a matter of where we keep our eyes focused. There is only one thing…and that is a living relationship with God through his son, Jesus Christ. Perhaps we need to declare this our summer of being still.

And there’s one other aspect of being still that’s important here. It’s the assurance of God’s presence and his promises in the midst of whatever is swirling around us. It’s possible, even in a crowd, to quiet our spirits and tell ourselves to be still and trust him because he’s God. Be still…in the midst of chaos.

I would love to send you out of here today with just this one thought. Here’s your homework. Ponder Mary sitting there at the feet of Jesus. And as you imagine the scene, put

yourself in the place of Mary. You are now the one sitting at the feet of Jesus…listening to him…asking him questions…listening to his answers…answering his questions about your life. Honestly now…would you get up and leave that spot for anything in the world? Is there anything that could be important enough for you to break that communion? Is there any meal in the world that would satisfy like the bread of life coming from the Master's lips? There is only one thing…and you have chosen the better thing and it will not be taken from you.

Go home, sweet ladies…Be still…and know that He is God.