

MARTHA AND MARY

~ Luke 10:38-41

The Lord and his disciples were travelling along
and came to a village.
When they got there,
a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.
She had a sister named Mary,
who sat down in front of the Lord
and was listening to what he said.

Martha was worried about all that had to be done.
Finally, she went to Jesus and said,
"Lord, doesn't it bother you
that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?
Tell her to come and help me!"

The Lord answered, "Martha, Martha!
You are worried and upset about so many things,
but only one thing is necessary.
Mary has chosen what is best,
and it will not be taken away from her."



Modern readers often regard Martha as a "homemaker" type of woman, concerned with household details. Some also view her as hospitable, a highly esteemed practice in Jesus' day. Mary often is seen as a more scholarly or spiritual woman, with a feminist personality. That she sat at Jesus' feet, meaning that she was his student or disciple.

Jesus gently rebukes Martha for being "worried and distracted" by her many tasks and her resentment of Mary's behavior. Jesus tells her that she has lost her focus; she needs only one thing. And what is that one thing? The answer is in the story of the Good Samaritan, which precedes this one. Martha needs to focus on loving God and her neighbor as herself; to do this one thing is to choose the better part, to be a disciple of Jesus.

The Story of Martha and Mary -

- Martha and Mary were sisters living in Bethany, located on the outskirts of Jerusalem.
- Martha's name is the feminine form of the Aramaic word *Mar* that means *Lord*. It might be a pun on the fact that she was the mistress (or Lord) of the house. Mary is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Miriam*. *WHAT DOES MIRIAM MEAN?* Lazarus is Hebrew for "he whom God helps." (Interestingly, one name is Aramaic, one Greek, and one Hebrew!)
- When Jesus arrived, Mary sat at his feet listening to his every word. (The image is one of a rabbi teaching his students. It was highly unusual for a woman to be accepted as a disciple. Few rabbis would "lower" themselves to doing this, although it was not forbidden *per se* for a woman to be instructed in the Torah.)
- Whenever someone "sits at one's feet," it symbolizes acknowledgement of his or her authority.
- It is possible that Jesus was there for a meal and was reclining on his side at the table. In that case, Mary would have been sitting (literally) at his feet.
- As hostess, Martha was very distracted; making sure everything was just perfect for her guest. This would have been a typical expectation for a woman (especially one who was head of the household) in the first century.
- When Martha asked Jesus if he cared that Mary had left her alone to do all the serving, she phrased the question in a way that indicated she expected him to say, "Yes, I care."
- She continued by asking him to tell Mary to help her. This would not have been an appropriate request. As a guest, Jesus should not have been asked to settle a family dispute.
- Jesus rarely answered the questions that were put to him. Rather he used them for teachable moments.
- In this case, he said to Martha that Mary had chosen the "good" part and that it should not be taken away from her. Yet, by saying, "Martha, Martha," Jesus indicated great tenderness and concern for Martha.
- Mary never said a word.
- Despite the tension between the two sisters, scholars say this story is not about the contemplative life versus an active life. It is about discipleship, and the fact that it is about women makes it that much more extraordinary.
- This story attests to the fact that in Jesus' ministry, women were not second-class citizens; they were recognized as being fully entitled to receive instruction from a teacher.