

**(Welcome to worship slide)**

**(Part 3 of 4 series slide)**

A study by the University of Rhode Island described the American home as the most dangerous place to be, outside of riots and wars! Listening in on this little snippet of family life between Martha and Mary, they might be right.

Did you notice the sibling rivalry? How could you miss it?! Martha is mad, mad, MAD at Mary.

I'm not criticizing Martha. Our family fought too. Well, my grandparents were, wow, how would you describe them...experts, gifted, talented...certainly tireless at fighting.

Man oh man. All my mom's siblings would get pulled into it with whatever Grandpa and Grandma were arguing over. One minute we'd be enjoying ourselves, visiting and laughing, listening to stories. And then the next minute...wham!

And my cousins and I would, more along the lines of Mary...we'd spill out the nearest screen door, a bit shell shocked, just to get some peace and quiet.

**(Slide sticking out tongues)**

As for sibling rivalry for me, to be a little honest, Martha and Mary's sibling stuff is tame. My brother and I would get to verbally bickering, and then yelling and then throwing things at each other in the house.

Until my mom would lose it, she'd explode saying, "It's like World War III in here!" And then she'd kick us outside.

**(Slide grey pinecones)**

Where our battles would just take on new dimensions of destruction. Nature providing in abundance those hard grey pinecones we'd hurl at each other.

Sibling rivalry is a real thing.

I do love this fascinating and revealing little snapshot of their family life. It rings true. We instantly get it. Yep, family is like that. Sisters are like that. And here, it seems to prove, you don't necessarily grow up out of it.

Proving to me, proving to all of us...these stories are about real people, not super saints. Real people living real and often real messy lives. Sisters, in their family home, feeding the guys and just trying to figure out this following Jesus thing, no roadmaps or signposts.

We have in this short account, what looks like just sibling rivalry or maybe some gender role issues. But when we look deeper, we realize this short account is about discipleship, our following of Jesus.

And the challenge and choice we each have to make to continually follow Jesus. To prioritize being WITH Jesus vs working FOR Jesus, as we look at Martha, Mary and then Jesus.

### **(Slide of grilling)**

Some of us relate to Martha. We've had our summer and things are almost wrapping up. We are coming off a season of hosting family and friends, maybe doing a little grilling.

We might connect a little more with Martha's worry and stress to make sure our guests enjoy themselves. There is a little hosting stress, cleaning the house, inviting others, hoping everyone is having a good time and getting enough good food to eat.

In our family, when we hosted, it was "all hands-on deck" to get things ready. Everyone in the family felt the pressure to pitch in to help.

But imagine hosting the Son of God, the Messiah on top of all of that? The most famous Rabbi ever stops by...announced or unannounced? With his hungry disciples in tow. That would put anyone on edge or over the edge.

But Martha kicks it in gear, opens her home, puts the middle leaf in the family table, and the sisters begin to prepare a meal.

### **(peeling potatoes)**

But at some point, in the meal prep, this had to happen, Mary began wondering to herself, "The Son of God is sitting in my living room. And I'm in the kitchen peeling potatoes?!"

And leaving the domain of her gender, her love and devotion drew her to Jesus. Her love and devotion gave her courage to step out of the kitchen and into the territory of men. Verse 39 provides this shocking information she, "...**sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.**" But only men sit and learn from a Rabbi, she knew that? Women were not allowed!

When Martha finally noticed Mary had dumped her for Jesus, she probably started out sighing. And then maybe glaring at Mary through the kitchen door. Finding that unsatisfying, maybe she started giving little clues like, "**Ah...these potatoes won't peel themselves!**"

### **(Slide of Martha)**

Eventually her frustration escalated past a few banging of pots and pans. Martha reached her breaking point interrupts Jesus and the men with..."**Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!**" She fully expects Jesus to side with her and get Mary back where she belongs...in the kitchen, helping her.

On the surface, we see sibling rivalry and gender roles. For sure.

But when we look a little deeper, there's more. We see two bigger universal truths vying for attention and prominence. There is a very real war, World War III raging inside of that home back then and in our own lives today.

With Martha, the necessity of service that slide into busyness versus with Mary, taking time to be with the Lord.

With Martha, loving service to the Lord tipped into something else entirely. Getting overly focused on tasks and to do lists, getting distracted from what is most important in life, slipping into judging others who aren't, according to your perspective, aren't working hard.

Versus Mary's choice to become still, willingly sitting at Jesus' feet. Fellowship with the Lord as a disciple, and emphasizing relationship, being with, and being focused on the Lord.

They battle inside of us.

Following Jesus, requires winning the battle. We need to prioritize correctly relationship with the Lord over tasks. Being less like Martha in that moment and more like Mary.

We know that's supposed to be our focus...

**(Slide of guy in car on cell)**

But it is so easy to get distracted. We know driving is important, important to stay focused. But we allow ourselves to get distracted sometimes.

Likewise, Martha got distracted from serving Jesus in love and relating well to her sister. Instead of keeping the meal simple. Instead of keeping the peace with her sister, and focusing on Jesus, she allows herself to get a bit wound up.

She became distracted by what Mary wasn't doing. Martha then slides into self-pity, feeling put upon and used, feeling abandoned, and hugely resentful.

Can we relate to Martha's struggle? We all probably struggle to not allow other distractions to creep in and steal our focus.

What a timely reminder for us. We need this reminder, to gently pull us back to relationships AND to THEE most important relationship. Gently pulling us back to the One who loves us unconditionally and longs for us to spend time with him.

We need this reminder. I need this reminder.

**(slide of Mary)**

We don't know much about Mary. But we know enough from this snippet to learn from her far-reaching example. It would be easy, and others have done this, to just treat this text as all about gender. Because it is about roles, no doubt.

When Mary went into the living room and sat at Jesus' feet, she was making a radical statement. It is along the lines, but even bigger, than when Rosa Parks sat down on the bus in the white's section during the Montgomery bus boycott.

In 1956 there were racial segregation rules, a black person wasn't supposed to sit down where she sat. And when she refused to give up her seat for a white person, she rang a bell heard around the world.

Rosa became a much-needed lightning rod for the civil rights movement, fighting racism and segregation, and became the spark for overdue change.

Same with Mary except bigger and quieter. There were long standing traditions of room usage in homes including roles. Men sat in the living room, the kitchen was for women. Only men could receive spiritual instruction and be disciples. Only men could sit at the feet of their Rabbi and learn.

Until Mary took a stand and sat down.

She refused to budge. She refused to remain ignorant. She was boldly declaring she was a disciple. Claiming equality with men? She was brave!

Yes, this story is about equality that Christ was bringing into the world. And in which the world is still slowly learning to embrace. Martha wanted Jesus to put Mary back in the "woman's place".

The "woman's place", really? Did you notice how Jesus' responded to Martha's loaded question, **"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"**

**(Slide of Jesus)**

**"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things,<sup>42</sup> but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."**

Jesus has a wise and surprising response. He refused to reinforce gender roles and rules for one. And he then he de-escalates World War III, refusing to get caught up in a family argument. He doesn't allow himself to get pulled into Martha's hurt and anger.

Instead, Jesus gently but wisely teaches Martha and us a better way. He responds with gentleness and compassion. With such a personal touch, Jesus says Martha's name twice to get her attention off Mary and on to him.

His response demonstrates to us again...following Jesus/Christianity is not about rules, roles, and regulations.

Christianity is about relationship.

Christianity is all about relationships...with friends, our neighbors, the community outside these walls, our community inside these walls, and family relationships. But most importantly, Christianity is about the relationship that exists between Jesus and the individual.

And in this passage, Jesus clearly prioritizes spending time with him. He upholds and honors Mary's desire to spend time with him.

**(slide of hands and bible)**

I've notice if we don't pause for Jesus and make time for Jesus; we can lose our way quick. We lose our way in following him, which reduces our ability to love others, and life can get significantly drained of meaning and purpose.

He affirmed Mary had chosen the better thing...listening and learning from Jesus.

And yet, it's hard to do what Mary did. We are human and we struggle with distractions and becoming still before the Lord. We struggle to make time to be with the Lord.

So, in closing I have an anonymous poem. Maybe it can become our collective prayer, maybe our heart's longing.

Dear God,

I am distracted.

Distracted by comparison.

Distracted by worry.

Connected to computers and cell phones.

Connected to calendars and chores.

Disconnected from others.

Disconnected from you.

HELP me love you.

HELP me sit at your feet.

Become my one true and holy passion.

Amen

In these next few moments of reflection, think about your desire to be more like Mary, the disciple. Make this poem a very real prayer from your heart to God's heart.