

Advent 4 - Mary & Martha

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Preacher: Jess McManus

[0 : 00] Hands up, who's ready for tomorrow? Okay, okay. Show off.

Hands up, who's feeling a little bit frazzled by just getting here today? You may not want to admit to this one, but I will.

Hands up, who has been so busy getting ready to celebrate peace and goodwill that in fact, you've really been lacking peace and goodwill this week.

Yeah, yeah. I struggle to focus. I really, you know, it's the lists, it's the to-dos, the what-ifs, the don't forget.

It's a lot, right? And, you know, it's too much. For me, I worry. And I'm pretty good at that.

[1 : 01] I am pretty good at focusing on that. And so I really relate to Martha here. Guests have turned up at her house, not just any guests, Jesus and his disciples.

They've all been traveling. They need feeding. There is no dominoes. There is no takeaway delivery service. Well, who's going to do it?

Martha. What a stress. And so she looks around. Where's her sister to help? Nowhere. Great. You can imagine the stress feeding that many people without preparation, without knowing, hey, I have done two Asda shops this week already.

Because I'm preparing. She had no preparation time. But she plays to her strengths and she gets in the kitchen. Can you, though, relate to those pushes, those pulls, those expectations that you put on yourself, the reality of the commitments, the offering to help, the balancing life, relationships, wealth, work, health, children, pets, just your general well-being, your self-improvement, faith.

Then there's surprises. Life throws in the mix. It is a lot. There is a lot to carry. And then you think, did I buy enough cranberry sauce?

[2 : 33] Proverbs tells us that an anxious heart weighs a man down. And boy, does it do that.

We also know that worry is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do and nowhere to go. But Jesus, in this story, he sees Martha.

And he understands the many worries she has, the many stresses, the strains, the pulls. And I think he's quite compassionate with her, actually.

You are worried and upset about many things, but few are needed. Indeed, only one. Mary has chosen what is better.

And that will not be taken away from her. You see, in her eagerness to serve Jesus, Martha almost missed the opportunity to know Jesus.

[3 : 41] And absolutely, serving God is a natural result of hearing his word and following in Jesus' footsteps. It's a wonderful thing. But so is being still.

And when God tells us not to worry, it isn't a suggestion, it's a command. You see, the kingdom of God is a paradox.

While the world applauds achievement, God desires companionship. While the world clamors, do more. But you can be, buy low, sell high, achieve, achieve, achieve.

Our father whispers. Our father whispers. Be still. And know that I am God. But if you, like me, are like Martha, and if your to-do list, your worry list is never ending, if it gnaws at you.

Know that is not what God wants for you. He doesn't want you overwhelmed, overworked, and burnt out. Know he wants peace for you. Jesus said, peace I leave with you.

[4 : 54] My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, but I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

And so tomorrow we celebrate the peace that God gave us that came in the form of a baby. I know, I know, but hopefully most of you will know what it's like to hold a baby.

If not, you've seen it with nieces, nephews, cousins, friends. You know when that baby sleeps on your chest, you're not going to get anything done, are you?

There is one, you don't want to wake it. But let's forget that bit. The beauty of holding that baby on your chest, and it sleeps, and you listen to it breathe.

That is really special. And you hold it, and you think about the potential it has. You can't get anything done. You can only focus on that one thing.

[6 : 09] And so I don't think it's such a coincidence that Jesus came as a baby. That tiny thing, the only thing you can focus on, you know, when you hold it, you can't get anything done.

It's amazing, it's full of potential. And that is God's gift to us, that baby. All his life, Jesus told us to focus on him, to follow him, to pray instead of worry, to take his hand when the wind and the waves felt too big and too strong.

And so tomorrow, as we celebrate Christmas Day, we celebrate Jesus' birth, the day God gave us a baby to love, to cherish, to hold, to be still and focus on.

Let's try to focus a little bit more than we have been, certainly this week. Like I said, the kingdom of God is a paradox, while the world applauds achievement.

God desires your companionship. The world clamors, do more, be all you can be. But our Heavenly Father whispers, be still and know that I am God.

[7 : 25] I pray that if, like Martha, there are things that trouble you, distract you, weigh you down, that you would be brave enough to offer them to God, and in turn receive Jesus, who came as a baby, that we would know his light, his love, and his peace.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, Prince of Peace, wonderful counsellor, light in the darkness, thank you for the gift of life.

Thank you that you came as a baby to save us, to lift us out of darkness, out of despair and sin. God, would you help us to be still?

Would you help us to focus on you? Would you help us not to have a worry list, but have a wonder list, and we remember all your promises. Lord, for the worries, the fears, and the hurt, we ask for your help and your healing, your perfect peace.

Amen. We would just also have a short time of intercessions as well. Martin Luther King said, Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that.

[8 : 57] Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that. Well, in him was life, and in that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you for the light and the darkness, that is you, that is Jesus Christ, as a babe.

Lord, no matter what the darkness of this world is, we know you are perfect love and perfect peace, and we praise you for that. Lord, thank you that you accept us as we are, that you love us as we are, and that you forgive us despite all we are.

Lord, we pray for situations in our lives and the lives of those known to us, for situations further afield where we need your peace. Lord, for the unknown in our lives, we claim you as our cornerstone, our light in the darkness.

For the hurt, we know you are healer. We know you are our found foundation. Lord, we live in a world that needs your light, but instead faces such darkness, natural disasters, conflicts, war, power plays at the cost of others.

[10 : 41] There are many today who will find themselves a migrant, a refugee, bereaved, displaced, and in despair. God, we pray for your peace and your healing and your light in the darkness.

Today we do remember those who are bereaved, who are alone, separated, those in families and relationships of high tension.

God, at this time of you, when we celebrate your peace, we pray for your peace and healing and your light in the darkness of those situations.

Dear God, we give thanks for the food banks and local charities, homeless shelters, all working so hard to shine that light this Christmas. God, would you bless the volunteers and would you bring those in who need peace, they need shelter.

Heavenly Father, we praise you for your hand on our lives, for your light in the darkness. Lord Jesus, help us to love each other as you have commanded.

[12 : 25] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen.