

# At Mary & Martha's

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 18 May 2025

Preacher: Peter Swaffield

- [ 0 : 00 ] We're going to turn briefly, but I hope effectively, to the Scriptures. Luke chapter 10 and verses 38 to 42.
- ! And just to reassure you, I've got four sermons to preach this morning.! Amen. Briefly.
- So, at the home of Martha and Mary, verse 38, it's Jesus and his disciples are on their way. He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.
- She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.
- She came to him and asked, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me.
- [ 1 : 12 ] Martha, Martha, the Lord answered. You're worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed, or indeed, only one.
- Mary has chosen what's better. And it will not be taken away from her. Sermon one.
- Sermon one. It's okay to complain. Somebody entered a monastery many years ago, I was told. And it was a silent order, so he wasn't allowed to speak.
- And after a year, he was allowed two words to say to the abbot. So he went in, and the abbot said, my son, it's spiritual saying to the dorm.
- And they said, see, I can do Latin as well. You have two words. He said, bed hard. So he went along for another year, and he went back to see the abbot.
- [ 2 : 20 ] Two more words after a year. Bless you, my son. What is it you want to share? Food, bad. Third year, he came in to the abbot.
- Bless you, my son. What two words do you want to share? I leave. Well, I'm not surprised. You've done nothing but complain since you got here in the monastery.
- So Martha really lets Jesus have it. She complains. And you know the Psalms well enough to know that it's okay to be honest with God.
- I know I shouldn't think this, but. We're not telling God. David lets rip, doesn't he? He really is honest. And so Jesus responds with gentleness and kindness.
- That's why there's the repeat there. Martha, Martha. He doesn't go, calm down, dear. He takes her complaining.
- [ 3 : 23 ] So look, you can trust God with the shadow side. Because he knows anyway. So you can let him have your complaints.
- Well, that wasn't too long, was it? That's sermon one. Sermon number two. Look, we're different. We have different personalities.
- And somebody would say Martha was an activist and Mary was a contemplative. Now, you might like Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 3, Classic FM, Jazz FM.
- Mmm, nice. You might have different drum and beat basses. I don't know what they're called, all these modern musicy things. But that's, you know, that's you.

We're different. And in worship, you know, it isn't either hymns or new songs. It's best of the old, best of the new.

[ 4 : 21 ] We're different. Church needs contemplatives and activists. What are we doing next? There would have been no communion to celebrate without somebody or people, you two, serving this morning so we can chill.

Somebody needs to put the chairs out. Somebody needs to check the heating and the lighting. And somebody needs to pray. And we're together in this.

We're the body of Christ, gifts of the Holy Spirit, given to all. And it ain't just more spiritual to prepare things. And together, we need to be who we are.

And we're made up of different characters and personalities. So if you want to be really spiritual, and I heard this from Steve Chalk, so it's true.

Okay. If you want to be spiritual, back in the day when church started, you pray with your arms stretched up.

[ 5 : 30 ] That's how everybody used to pray, apparently, he said. So if you want to be really radical, keep your hands down. We're all different.

Sermon number two. Sermon number two.

Sermon number two. And he says hi, and there's hospitality expected in that culture.

And poor Martha can't phone Uber Eats. She can't phone Domino's. Domino's. She can't just get the pizzas in for the lads, right? But one commentator that I read in preparation said, said when Jesus used the phrase, only one thing is needful, he meant, and I'm serious what they said, only one course.

I don't think so. But is Martha being too busy by over-catering? That's a serious question. So Martha was too busy with the three courses and a starter.

[ 7 : 11 ] I mean, she was going to do the whole thing and a selection of sweets from the trolley. Anybody old enough to remember the Bernie Inns? I was there. A selection of sweets from the trolley.

It's harvesters now, isn't it, with help yourself but small plates. And wasn't Auntie Bren a key figure here?

Didn't she used to have open house? And I talked with Penny and Barry, Barry Marsh, Penny. They were here. And I don't think, I might be wrong, I don't think that Bren did all the catering every Sunday for open house.

Didn't everybody help a bit? People brought stuff. And so it wasn't that suddenly Bren is working all week with different stuff.

But that was hospitality. There was an open house, an open heart. And it wasn't that everything was kind of mega planned.

[ 8 : 16 ] So when you have your shared lunch, how does that work? People bring things, so you're ahead of the game. So that is sermon number three. Just do it.

When I was at university, the dean of the college used to have open house on a Saturday. It was the same menu because we checked with everybody. Roast chicken and green jelly afterwards.

It was the same every single time. But he opened his house. It wasn't to do with the best cuisine. It was with the best hospitality. A family invited other people from church to come to lunch, and maybe they'd overdone it a bit.

They were very stressed. But when everybody got around the table with the guests there, the father, head of the house, said to one of his children, would you like to say grace now?

Because it's a good Christian family, right? And they all bowed their heads, and the boys said nothing. Said, Daniel, go on to Saint Grace.

[ 9 : 27 ] They're letting the side down. Said nothing. Okay, well, they'd practiced this. Mummy had practiced it. So he said, say what mummy said this morning.

Oh, no, not those people from church. Amen. Amen. But the point is, just do it, and hospitality doesn't need to be Michelin star.

Third sermon. Women in leadership is fine. Okay? Okay, I'll move on then. But Martha is angry that Mary's not helping, but Mary is, quote, sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Why? Because he's a rabbi. Why? Because he's teaching a woman. A woman who's not given very much prestige in that culture, not allowed to really give a testimony in the court of law that would stand up, you know, compared with a man.

A rabbi apparently would start prayers every day. Thank you, God, for blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and for not making me a woman. Cheers. That's great. The women were last at the cross, first at the tomb.

[ 10 : 49 ] And to a woman was given the message of the resurrection. First preacher. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the 19th century Victorian preacher, he said in that moment, the Lord bestowed on a woman an honorary doctor of divinity degree.

Now, if you go to Spurgeon's College today, in the library, there is like a relief of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. And it says, basically, Charles Haddon Spurgeon teaching his students, passing on the message.

I have a message for Spurgeon's College. They're all men. But over the mantelpiece in the dining room at Spurgeon's College is a picture of somebody called Rick Warren.

Now, Rick is the chancellor of Spurgeon's University, the first one. Rick Warren wrote the books, Purpose Driven Church, pastor of a church called Saddleback, 10,000, I'll say that again, 10,000 members, just been thrown out of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Why? Because he's a sinner. What's his sin? He's ordained women preachers. So he's out of there. So, Jesus was valuing women.

[ 12 : 18 ] Women were part of his supporters, bankrolling him. They were together at Pentecost. Joel's prophecy on both men and women.

Junius is a feminine ending for one of the apostles. Priscilla and Aquila, joint leaders. Sometimes it's Priscilla and Aquila.

Sometimes it's Aquila and Priscilla. But if you put Priscilla first, that means she's leading. So maybe a house church led by a woman.

So that's sermon number three. We doing all right so far? Okay. So in conclusion, sermon number four. By the way, I don't think those are the main meanings.

What do you think a phrase one thing needful means? I said earlier that Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem.

[ 13 : 27 ] Why would he take time to teach Mary? To make a point about women in leadership or the contemplative life or simple catering?

He's on his way to Jerusalem. What's going to happen there?

It's his journey to the cross. What has he been saying again and again to the disciples? They don't get it, but he's saying the Son of Man is going to suffer and die and he'll be raised again.

And they don't get it, but he keeps teaching because that's the point. One thing needful. I'm arguing from silence, so do be careful and check it out whether you think it fits.

But what is he teaching Mary about? Surely it's about the journey to Jerusalem and what the cross of Calvary is going to mean and what the resurrection will mean for all eternity.

[ 14 : 37 ] I think Jesus wanted all of his disciples, men and women, to understand that he was a good shepherd who'd give his life for the sheep.

One thing needed, the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul says, I receive what I passed on to you of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

One thing needful. Paul says again, I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Christ, except Jesus and him crucified.

One thing needful. And today sometimes it isn't one thing needful, it's one thing plus something else.

I've spoken with people who would say, you know, it's Jesus, but actually it's this ministry, this ministry.

[ 16 : 07 ] And it used to be said decades ago, if I was here at Hearn Hill, I would have said, oh yeah, I was under the ministry of, and I would use the name of the minister at the time.

When I was here, it was the Reverend Warner, Rob Warner. For three years, my eldest went to Bessemer Grange School, Dulwich Junior School, and my two girls went to Montessori Nursery, just up the road there, I think.

So I was under the ministry of Rob. But now, you don't need to be under anybody's ministry in a church here. You could be here, but actually your minister is in the Philippines because you tune into that.

And that's really the ministry that I'm under. But Jesus says one thing is needful. That doesn't mean we shouldn't make use of the internet and get the best teaching of premium radio, whatever encourages you.

But are you following, am I following Jesus crucified and risen? Or is it Jesus plus that flash minister whose hair I admire, whose suit I would love to have, who must have a dry cleaning bill that is astronomical because he's always so immaculately dressed and he's successful.

[ 17 : 41 ] or do I follow the crucified and risen Lord alone? Or I follow Jesus and I'm going to be healthy and wealthy and happy all the time.

Well we've already prayed that God is with us in our difficulties and it's not that I'm a sinner if I'm in King's acute unit.

I am a sinner but I'm a sinner who's saved and the fact that I might need medicine doesn't make me a failure because according to the ministry that I'm under I should be healthy, wealthy and happy all the time so it's Jesus plus that ministry no it's Jesus the one thing needful is Christ crucified and risen.

Or I am following Jesus but some people don't believe what I believe about the state of Israel now and so for me it's Jesus plus this view about the state of Israel.

Are you that sure? Are you that sure that the nation state of Israel today is the same as the promises given to the nation state of Israel in the Old Testament?

[ 18 : 59 ] Are you really that sure? people? Just check that for you and me it's Jesus alone as the Reformation put it.

Christ alone through his word alone by faith alone. God said it. I believe it. That settles it. It can't be Jesus plus.

Now I'm treading on dodgy ground now if not before. But at a recent conference and I give a tribulation I attribute this to him but I agree with it.

Reverend Nicky Gumbel who's German in background and Jewish in background. He did some family research. Many of his family members were killed in Auschwitz. But as he researched the state of the German church at the time of the Second World War and the figures are figures I remember from two weeks ago when he said it.

He said at the time of the rise of the far right in Germany out of 12,000 named churches 3,000 became what we call the confessing church and the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Pastor Niemoller would be synonymous with that.

[ 20 : 18 ] In other words they said you cannot have another God. If you call Führer your leader you're having another Jesus. It's Jesus alone.

We will not bow the knee to another political Lord. 3,000 churches. 6,000 didn't say anything.

3,000 taking verses from here and there said no he's our leader democratic did he and Nicky Gumbel did not put this image on the screen because he said it was so offensive and he wouldn't do it.

He was PowerPoint 2.0 but he wouldn't use a PowerPoint for this image. He said the 3,000 German churches who agreed with the far right they had a symbol of the cross with a swastika imposed.

And I have family who are treading a very careful course as committed Christians in America and I love so many Americans and I really do and I'm just being very careful in what I say but it's as if in some parts of the Christian church if you don't vote for Trump then you're not a Christian.

[ 22 : 03 ] It's as simple as that. And I'm not saying if you vote Democrat you're a Christian. I'm not saying that. There are things in both parties and I can't vote in the states so I'm not going to get all heads up about it.

Pray yes. but it's like Jesus and Trump or Jesus and Kamala. Praise God for organizations like CARE that are involved in politics in our country.

Pray for politicians and your local MP and you used to have Harriet Harmon living just over the road there. So yes. but it can't be that Jesus is aligned with a particular party and if you're not in that party that you're not a proper Christian.

That can't be the one thing needful. One thing is needed.

I'm not a morning person. My wife would testify to that. But the last few mornings I've woken up with an old chorus in my head and I close with this.

[ 23 : 25 ] There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin. There's a door that is open and you may go in.

At Calvary's cross is where you begin when you come as a sinner to Jesus.

Martha, Martha, you're worried about so many things. I love you. I love you. But Mary's chosen to listen to why I'm going to Jerusalem.

one thing is needful through Christ alone, by faith alone, through his word alone.

Let's pray together. one thing one thing one thing one thing one thing one thing one thing  
one thing one thing one thing one thing one thing one thing one thing one thing  
one thing one thing one thing one thing one thing one thing one thing one thing!

[ 24 : 48 ] One thing one thing