

# One Thing

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Date: 25 February 2024

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Are you the one who is on every single rota because you want to help, you want to be busy, you want to make sure things can happen? Or are you the Mary? Are you the one who sits and listens, who wants to spend their Sunday mornings just in the service listening to what's happening?

Or when you have guests just want to sit there in the guest, someone else can do the work in the kitchen, you just want to be there. Which one are you? In fact, you can, if you would like to, you don't have to, for about half a minute, turn to the person next to you and actually talk about, on very surface level, which one would you say you are, Mary or Martha?

So which one are you, Mary or Martha? Do you prefer to be busy and make sure things happen and make sure everyone's having a good time? Or do you prefer to be Mary? Do you sit there and do you listen? Do you prefer to be present?

That is so often what is suggested from this story in the Bible is that you've got a choice. You can either be present and you can listen to Jesus or you can be in the kitchen.

You can be making things happen. You can be too busy to hear what Jesus has to say. Actually, this morning, I want to suggest that's not what this story is about. As far as we know, Martha could have been in the kitchen working, but listening to everything Jesus was saying.

[ 1 : 2 9 ] Mary could have been sat there at his feet, enjoying being there, but just off in her own world, not really paying any attention. The Bible doesn't actually tell her, give us that information. But also Jesus never once says to Martha, stop what you're doing in the kitchen, come through here.

He lets her get on with it. It's only when Martha comes in to complain about Mary that Jesus says, what are you doing complaining? Mary's chosen to be here. Let her have that.

He never actually tells Martha that she is wrong. So the question of Mary or Martha, I think is actually an unfair and a misleading question, because I think we can all be both of them, and I think we all should.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

Then Mary took about half a litre of pure nard, an expensive perfume. She poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the fragrance of perfume.

[ 2 : 4 3 ] But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.

He did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. Leave her alone, Jesus said.

It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me. Amen.

So that reading comes from about six days before the Passover feast. So we're right at the very beginning, very close to the Easter week at this point.

The other reading, the one that we started with, or the one from Luke, is from much earlier in Jesus' ministry. But that's the one that we are focusing on today.

[ 3 : 47 ] But there are comparisons to be drawn between the two as well. Mary chose to broke this perfume for Jesus. Judas wasn't lying when he said that it was worth a year's wages.

He was lying about his intentions and his reasons for saying it. But that was an expensive perfume. And Mary chose to break that to anoint Jesus then. Actually, from what Jesus said, that was supposed to be saved for his burial anyway.

So Jesus was basically saying, but this is something that's been devoted to me anyway. So it's good that Mary's decided to give this to me now instead of waiting. But going back to the story in Luke, Jesus said to Martha, Mary has chosen the one thing that is important.

Me. I said before that I don't think that means that... There it is.

Can we have the last PowerPoint now, please? I don't think that means that Jesus was saying, Martha, you're wrong for everything that you've been doing. Actually, it's okay to be busy sometimes.

[ 4 : 59 ] If we didn't have people who chose to be busy on a Sunday or during the week, we'd have no tech on a Sunday. We'd have no band. We'd have nobody leading the service, no teen coffee, no youth and kids groups.

We need people to be a little bit like Martha. Actually, like many churches, we need more people who can be a bit like Martha, who can give us some of that time.

Because that's the only way things can happen. Martha wasn't doing anything out of the ordinary. Yet Martha wasn't doing anything out of the ordinary. It was normal for the women in the house to be in the kitchen, to be cooking the food, to be keeping the mess out of the way, to be a good host for Jesus.

She wasn't doing anything she shouldn't be doing. According by the culture, it was Mary that was wrong. But what Jesus said to Martha is, no, if Mary wants to be here, that's fine.

For those of you who are around on a Friday evening during blue, both our youth and children and helpers, some weeks you will probably see me running around all over the place, going from one room to another, dealing with one, sometimes dealing with one problem or another, sometimes just making sure things are happening, things are working.

[ 6 : 15 ] Sometimes on a Friday, I feel like I'm running around a bit like a headless chicken, just constantly on the move. What I love to be doing is those times when I get to sit with, I get to sit and chat with the children in the blue room, or I get to play games in the youth room, or on Friday just gone, we had pancakes for the youth and children that were there.

And while the clearing up was going on, I was talking to a couple youth, and I was taking the opportunity to be present with them. And in the back of my mind, I was thinking, I'm leaving my other helpers to do all the clearing up here.

And I feel like I should be helping. But actually, what was important at that moment in time was to be present. If I was to go into every single Friday with that mindset of, I'm just going to sit down, I'm just going to hang out with the children and youth, although that's what I love doing, the conversations, the games, the chances that I get to share Jesus with them, they are the things that I love doing in youth and kids work.

But if the mindset I have is to only do that every single week, blue won't run. It won't happen. Either that or my team will be running around behind me, just begging me to do something.

Because there is work that needs to go in to making these things happen. So it is okay to be a Martha.

[ 7 : 40 ] But why are we doing it? Are you doing it to be a good host? If you've got guests, especially if you're hosting on your own, which I obviously have to do, because I don't have family, I don't have housemates, you've got to do a little bit of work.

I've got to do some work to make sure the food's ready, to make sure everyone's come to things like that. And usually, I'll invite the guests to come into the kitchen with me, so actually I can be doing things, and I can be talking to them at the same time.

As I said, on Sundays we need people to be Marthas to be able to make things happen. But why are we doing it? Are we doing it to be a good host? Are we doing it, are we doing it in order to provide a great youth and children's group?

In order to make sure, make sure we have songs that we can sing, make sure the service happens on a Sunday to benefit everyone else who's here? Is that the reason? Or are we doing it because it's a distraction?

Because we like to be busy. I know I can put my hand up and say, I love to be busy. Because when I'm busy, I'm distracted. And I can spend more time doing that and less time thinking about the other things I don't really want to be thinking about.

[ 8 : 51 ] So it's okay to be a Martha, but why are we doing it? And it's okay to be a Mary. It is okay to be present. And that's what Jesus calls us to do, is to be present with him.

Whether it's on a Sunday or making even just two minutes or five minutes during the day, each day, just to be present with God, with the Bible.

But if that's all we do, are we missing out on being a part of what's going on? Are we missing out on the chance to provide somebody an amazing meal, to be a part of an amazing youth and kids group, to be a part of a great service on a Sunday?

I don't think it is a question of being one or the other. If all we do is one of them, we're missing out on something. But actually, the more that I read this passage and the more that I was looking at what other people have said about it during the week, the more I've come to think that actually Jesus suggests it's good to be both.

Be a Mary and a Martha. Sometimes we can do that at the same time. Sometimes it's just a matter of while you're doing your homework or revising for an exam or baking in the kitchen or running around doing first aid on a Friday.

[ 10 : 12 ] You can still spend that time thinking about God. Spend that time in prayer. Spend that time listening to God. You don't have to say, this is my work time.

This is my God time. But there is one important thing to bring out, whichever one we're doing at any given time or both at the same time. There is only one thing that is really important.

I've got that question there that I'm going to leave you to think about for a second. Whether you're being a Mary or a Martha, what is it that comes first for you?

Because that's what I think this story is about. It's not about should we be busy or should we be present. It's about what is the most important thing. And in a moment, we're going to watch a video.

Anyway, we're going to have a video. It's of a worship song. It's called Lead Me to the Cross. If you know the song, feel free to sing along to it. If you don't, or if you just want to watch the video, listen to the words, you can do that too.

[ 11 : 20 ] But we are, we're in a series called Journey to the Cross because that is where we're heading as we draw closer to Easter. We're heading to the cross.

The whole point of church is supposed to be about Jesus. But this series in particular is about focusing ourselves on Jesus's journey, putting him first, making him the one thing.

Lead me to the cross. May everything I hold dear be laid down. That's what the Journey to the Cross is about. It's not about us.

It's about Jesus. It's not about whether we are busy in the kitchen or whether we're sitting and listening. Both are important to do.

But both are meaningless if we make it about us because they're supposed to be about Jesus. Last week, we were talking with the youth and the children about being all in for Jesus.

[ 12 : 23 ] And I told a story about a housemate that I lived with when I was in Cardiff. This was about, it's 2010, 2009, 2010. It's about 14 years ago. And he played semi-professional football.

So his team was in the league just below making it into professional. So although he wasn't paid salary, they got money for matches that they played. And I remember him saying to me, because he would go probably at least every other week to play.

And I remember him saying to me at one point that he had picked up an attitude of from the moment he sets foot on the pitch to the moment he comes off, whether that's at the end of the game or he's taken off for a sub because of injury, he does not stop praying.

That doesn't mean he's running the pitch, running around the pitch, muttering words, moving his mouth. But he's spending the whole game putting Jesus first. He's spending the whole game, the one thing that is important to him.

Despite the fact, whether he is busy running with the ball, going for tackles, scoring goals, I don't actually remember what position he played in, or whether he was on the pitch waiting for the opportunity, being a little bit more relaxed, if you can actually do that in a football match.

[ 13 : 43 ] Whatever he was doing at any given time, he was doing it for Jesus. It says multiple times in the Bible, in everything you do, do it for God. And that's what it means to put Jesus, make Jesus the one thing.

We're going to, in a moment, we're going to finish with a song. We're going to finish with Happy Day. And I'm aware that this is a song that is typically sung on, or it's typically about, it is about Easter Sunday.

But I think we can sing it at any time. But also we are thinking about the cross. We're thinking about following Jesus to the cross, putting that first. And actually the most important part of Easter isn't, I would, please don't shoot me down for saying this, I would say isn't the crucifixion.

Yes, that is really, really important. But without Easter Sunday, the crucifixion is meaningless. If Jesus does not come back to life, his death on the cross for us has no meaning. So we're going to sing a song about Easter Sunday, that happy day when Jesus led us to the cross, not just to standing at the foot of the cross where he died, but beyond where he came back to life as well.

So let's make our one thing Jesus. Whether you're going to be busy or present, both are good, both are important. But make the choice to put Jesus first.

[ 15 : 03 ] There's a reason why the empty cross is the symbol for our faith as Christians, why we have it in the church. Because the empty cross, the cross that Jesus died on, but came back to life afterwards, is the center of our faith.

It is the one thing that is the most important. So this week in whatever you're doing, choose to make Jesus your one thing. Thank you.