

She wanted to talk with me. She had a concern: she was worried that she worried too much! She was a worrier and she was also a prayer warrior. She prayed about what she worried about - but, she was concerned that most of her days were spent worrying and not enjoying the day. We both knew that she would never stop worrying — We also knew that she would never stop praying. We also knew that she needed to worry less and enjoy life more!

Mary and Martha were sisters with two different personalities and agendas. Jesus was coming to dinner and there was so much to do. It would probably not just be Jesus, but there would be those who were traveling with him. Everyone in the village would know what type of hospitality the home offered, what the meal was and how well it was served it. (It was the village way of life; Martha had a reputation to uphold.)

I see Martha as a person who wanted everything done properly. The meal should be served on time, the guests greeted appropriately. It was not easy to prepare for such a crowd. Now, this does not seem like a planned event, Jesus just drops in as he was passing through. This could make things even more hectic. Martha had no opportunity to plan ahead. Is there enough food in the household? There is so much to do. Perfection does not come easily.

I see Mary as not as concerned about the meal. She was in with the men sitting at the feet of Jesus. Although there may be other women this was not the custom of the day. There were things that she should be doing to help Martha. But, Jesus was in the living room. Mary may have preferred a more simple meal than the one Martha had in mind, so she could listen to Jesus. How often do you get to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his stories?

Martha had had enough. She comes to Jesus with the demand, “Tell her to help me.” — Can you see her storming into the room? She wanted Jesus to get Mary back in the kitchen where she belongs. She wants everything to go perfectly. There was so much to do. I mean, doesn’t Jesus want to eat on time? Tell her to get back in the kitchen with me.

Jesus does not rebuke Martha or Mary. He simply stated the obvious, “You are worried and distracted by many things.” There was nothing wrong with Martha’s concerns, but they were distracting her from what was important. Does it really matter if the table is set perfectly? Does it really matter if the meal is two courses rather than three? Does it really matter what the village thinks about her hospitality. The hour should be focused on what is of greater value. Here was an opportunity to be with Jesus. Here was an opportunity to be in community with others. Why stay in the kitchen? Will the people remember Martha’s meal or Jesus’ stories? And, if Jesus can feed 5000 with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish...

Max Lucado in [A Distant Thunder](#), points out that the church needs both Mary and Martha. We need someone who constantly reminds us of what needs to be done. And, we need someone who constantly reminds us of our need to stop and worship. Imagine a world with one and not the other. We visited another congregation while on vacation few years ago. We wanted to see a friend and were surprised to find her sitting in the sanctuary for worship. She had been the mainstay of the older nursery (3-5 year olds) for over twenty-five years. She was a fixture there. The room was named after her. We wondered if she was sick, if she had to give up the love of her life. After worship she assured us that this was not the case, she was as able as ever. However, the new pastor was insisting that nursery attendants should be in worship from time to time. They had to be in worship at least one Sunday a month. This was her Sunday. Yes, she was needed in the nursery but she also needed to be in the Sanctuary. She also noted how good it was to be in worship — to sit a Jesus’ feet again.

Martha was distracted and worried about many things. It was consuming her life. Jesus teaches about how worry can rob us of life (Matthew 6:25-39 - read this morning in our opening). Jesus asked if worry can add any years to our life. Can worry add a hair to your head? No, it can consume us and we miss out on life. Just looked at what God does provide - the birds of the air, the flowers of the field. We should do what is needed for today and understand that God is in control of tomorrow. Trust God for tomorrow (not to not plan, but not to let worry consume us). We are not to let our lives be filled with “What if’s...” Most of the things we spend our time worrying about never happen. Days are spent worrying over things that seldom happen. Yes, we take precautions, but worry should not consume us.

At the fireworks on July 3 - I got two great big hugs. One was from one of our pre-k students and the other was from one of our Wings students. Now, if we had spent our days worrying about whether or not we could do Wings to Reading and Stepping Stones those hugs would never have happened. They were worth every moment. There are things we cannot change, even with all the worry in the world we cannot change. But, there are those things that we can change if we stop our worrying and ignore the distractions.

We can pray, listen and then do what we can. We should not spend our days worrying about what might happen. That is not to say that we are not concerned about possibilities. However, if we want peace, we must work for peace. If we want to feed the hungry, then we must work at feeding the hungry. We do what we can — and at times that is simply sitting at the feet of Jesus. Martha was fretting in the kitchen. Mary was enjoying the stories of Jesus. It does no good to spend our time worried and distracted. We need to learn to understand what is important.

What is more important? A clean sink or time spent with children in play, craft projects or homework help? A perfect house or a family having fun together? A perfect meal or time spent in fellowship? The world is full of distractions and worries. News last evening showed the people of Nice trying to return to life. The beaches were again filled with people — the message to the terrorists was — you are not going to distract us — you are not going to win! So often the world tries to distract from what is most important. We spend so much time making sure our buildings are perfect that we forget the people around us. Our ministry is not the building but people.

God held yesterday, God holds today and God will hold tomorrow.

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NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985  
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988