

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Pentecost 6

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Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl

Don't just do something, sit there!

As they went on their way, Jesus came into a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who was sitting at the Lord's feet and was listening to his word. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with all her serving. She came over and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me."

⁴¹The Lord answered and told her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴²but one thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part, which will not be taken away from her."

—Mark 10:38-42

For the next several weeks, our overarching worship theme is "Focused." I don't know how it is in your life, but I find that I can easily become distracted from what is important. We have so many different things vying for our attention. Just do a mental checklist of your calendars. What sort of things do you have that grab your attention?

Your job. Your family. Your house. Meal prep. The cars need maintenance. The yard needs attention. A lot of you serve in many different capacities in the church or the school. You have meetings to attend, various responsibilities. These are all things that you can count on to do, right?

And then, of course, there is the unexpected things that pop up in your life that you need to attend to. Someone in your family gets sick and is hospitalized. A friend is going through depression. Your neighbor is going through a tough time in life and needs someone to talk to. We have so many things vying for our attention.

And here's the rub. These are all good things. Right? I mean, your job, your family, your house, your cars, your friends, your neighbors, all of these things and people are important in your life. God has made you stewards of these things. He wants you to attend to them. By taking care of all those things and serving all those people, you are in reality serving Jesus. And that's a good thing.

But where do you find the strength to attend to all those things? You see, here is where our worship series comes in. What is your primary focus? Do you primarily focus on your service to Jesus? Or is your primary focus on Jesus' service to you? The theme of our worship today is focused worship seeks service *from* Jesus more than service *for* Jesus.

I would imagine that the biblical account that is before us today is very familiar to many, if not, all of you. Jesus made a visit to the home of two sisters, Mary and Martha. And we see how two sisters reacted differently to Jesus' visit. Mary sits at Jesus' feet and listens to him. She is primarily seeking service *from* Jesus. And Martha is frantically getting things ready to serve Jesus. She is focused on service *for* Jesus.

Now I want to be clear here. Sometimes I think we can give the wrong impression about Martha. We may look down on Martha and conclude that what she is doing is not good. That's not it at all. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Martha is serving Jesus. She is doing things for her Lord. That's a good thing. I mean, if you were having a guest over, you would do the same thing, right? Clean the house, prepare the meal, make the visit as comfortable as possible for your guest. You would do that.

How much more if Jesus came by the house? Oh my, you would want everything perfect. You would want your Lord to feel honored and welcomed. You would want to be the host or hostess for Jesus. You would want to serve him. Right? Am I right about this? I would. I would want everything perfect for my Lord if he came by my house. I want to serve Jesus.

Martha's not doing a bad thing. It is a very honorable thing that she is doing for Jesus. But Luke tells us in his gospel, "**But Martha was *distracted with all her serving.***" She was distracted. She lost focus on something that was even more important and something more that she needed.

In fact, in all of her distractions, she went to Jesus and said, "**Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me.**" What did she want Jesus to say to Mary? She wanted Jesus to say, "Mary, don't just sit there, do something." Right?

Mary was just sitting there listening to Jesus teach. These are grown women, but I can hear the chiding come through Martha's lips. "Jesus, my sister is just sitting there. I'm doing all the service. I'm doing all the work for you. Tell her to do something." Right?

Now much to her astonishment, I would imagine, Jesus responded, **“Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part, which will not be taken away from her.”** Jesus isn’t rebuking Martha for her willingness to serve him. She’s not doing something wrong. Serving Jesus is a good and honorable thing. But Jesus is gently refocusing her on what is most important, the one thing needed, the better part. I can almost hear the surprising remark from Jesus to Martha: “Martha, don’t just do something, sit there. Martha, come, sit at my feet. Let me serve you. Let me be your host. Let me prepare a banquet table of the best food for your soul. Martha, don’t just do something, sit there.”

The things that Martha was so concerned about, as good as they are, those things diminish and fade. How long does a clean house last? How long does a well-prepared meal last? Can a clean house or a delicious meal prepare you for life’s challenges? Can the efforts you put in to make a comfortable home really give you strength and guidance when you face some unexpected curveballs? Can the tidy home really carry you through times of crosses and grief?

Ah, but the very thing that Jesus was offering was something that would never be taken away. The promise that he will work out everything for our eternal good equips us to face difficult times. The gift of eternal life that he places upon us as we see the Son of God live and die among us keeps us focused on an eternal goal. And the promise that he is the Resurrection and the Life carries us through times of loss and heartache.

Would Martha have known those promises if Jesus had not encouraged her to refocus on what her sister was focused on? I don’t know. But what I do know is that not too long after this visit, both Mary and Martha would face a really big challenge in their lives.

You see, soon their brother Lazarus would become sick. Very sick. The sisters would serve Lazarus. They would tend to him. But what is it like to see your brother fade from this life? What is it like to hear from the doctors that there is nothing they can do? When Lazarus became sick, Mary and Martha sent word for Jesus to come. Martha even knew that if Jesus came, he could heal Lazarus. But Jesus didn’t come. He wasn’t physically there. In fact, when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he intentionally waited before going to Bethany to see them.

And then it happened. Lazarus died. Have you had someone close to you die? It rips your heart. Your mind is flooded with memories. And then that person is gone. As Mary and Martha tended to their brother Lazarus and saw him close his eyes in death, what kept them going? What gave them strength?

Why didn’t Jesus go to be with Mary and Martha when Lazarus was sick? Why did he wait until Lazarus was dead? Oh, certainly we know from Jesus’ own words that he went to Bethany in order to show the glory of God. He went to Bethany in order to raise Lazarus from the dead. But I wonder if there isn’t something more.

Jesus had been preparing Mary and Martha for challenging times in their lives. In their home, on this occasion that we are focusing on today, Jesus was refocusing them on the fact that the most important thing in their lives is that Jesus served them. He served them with the promises and truth of his Word.

Mary and Martha didn’t know the challenges that they would face shortly afterwards as their brother would become sick and die. But as the Son of God, Jesus knew. He also knew what they needed in order to keep them going. He knew what they needed to give them strength. The teaching that Jesus gave to Mary and Martha on that day in their home was not taken away from them. “Don’t just do something, sit there.”

I always imagined that Martha took to heart Jesus’ encouragement to her. I always imagined that Martha put down the apron to be fed and served by Jesus. I don’t know for sure. I do know that later, in the midst of such heartache at the loss of their brother, Martha gave a beautiful confession of faith. On the day when Jesus came to visit Martha and Mary when their brother Lazarus died, Martha said to Jesus, **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”** Jesus said to her, **“Your brother will rise again.”** Martha answered, **“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”** Jesus said to her, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”** **“Yes, Lord,”** she told him, **“I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world”** (John 11:21-27).

What would give her such a faith? What would carry her through such a tough time? What would give her strength when she needed it the most?

It was Jesus’ teaching. “Don’t just do something, sit there.” It was sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning such comforting truths from Jesus’ Word. Jesus served her with his promises. That’s why she could give such a beautiful confession of faith.

Oh, how easy it could have been for Martha to miss out on the one thing she needed. Oh, how easy it can be for *me* to miss out on the one thing I need. Huh?

There are so many things in my life that I can worry about. So many things that distract me. Are they there for you too? And how easy is it for us to defend those distracting and worrisome things by pointing out that we are serving Jesus. We are busy doing things for our spouses and children. We are preoccupied with serving our church and community. All good things. But things that can also distract us from the most important thing.

Jesus says to us, "Don't just do something, sit there." Come and sit down at Jesus' feet. He wants to give you his saving and empowering grace. Come and sit down at Jesus' feet. He wants you to know that he is your Rock and Refuge. Come and sit down at Jesus' feet. He wants to communicate with you a message of comfort because he knows what lies ahead of you. You don't, but he does. Come and sit down at Jesus' feet. Whatever challenge, cross, or trial is about to come to you, he wants to equip you to be ready for it by strengthening you with his eternal gospel. Come and sit down at Jesus' feet. He wants you to know that whatever may come at you in the near future is not too strong or too overwhelming to take his promises from you. Come and sit down at Jesus' feet. He wants to give you his Word which will never be taken away, which will sustain forever.

Oh, how I need this reminder. I need the constant reminder from Jesus that unless he is tending to my heart, I can be of no good in tending to others.

Oh, how I need this reminder that unless he is pulling me more firmly into his embrace, I can be of no good in embracing others.

Oh, how I need this reminder that he gives solutions to my perplexing problems, and he gives them to me in his Word, and that will never be taken away.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for patiently knocking on my heart to place inside me what I need the most. Teach me. Woo me. Win me. Gently draw my heart to sit at your feet as you speak to me again and again through your Word.

"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!" Amen.