

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 10:38-42

“You are anxious about many things.”

You know what amazes me? How much we all need to do. You know what amazes me even more? The world manages to keep spinning when the stuff we need to do doesn't get done. We are a country of busy, anxious people. Families say goodnight before they ever said good morning, drawn apart during the day by innumerable “necessities.” We abhor silence. We fear those awkward moments when we are left unprotected among other human beings, with no computer or telephone between us. We don't want to think, so we let the television and internet think for us. We don't want to deal with the hard questions, so we settle for pious platitudes and trite truisms. Life after death? Who has time to worry about that? We have to mow the lawn, surf the web, stop at Starbucks, and text message our friends.

Soon our church life begins to look and feel like the busy and distracted world in which we live. Silent meditation? Too uncomfortable. A full hour for a service? Not during football season, deer season, or seasons whose names end in consonants. Church music? Many would rather have some of those good old tunes, like the stuff they got drunk to in college or heard last night at the bowling alley. The tune, not the text becomes important, and no one cares if such music is associated with often anti-Christian messages. Websites for supposedly Lutheran churches actually advertise, “We keep it loud, real, and rockin.” The sermon? Most want something more practical, which often means something devoid of substance and filled with cute stories and hilarious jokes. “Nothing too deep,” many tell their pastors, “Just reaffirm what I want to hear and give me something to rev me up for the week. That is why they call you Rev., right?” Even much of the Lutheran Church today is full of popes, spouting man-made doctrines and denying God's, creating their own worship centered on man, and dressing shallow numerical motives in sacred attire. Arguments are increasingly based on emotion and convenience. Scriptural, confessional, Lutheran thought and practice is dismissed as not thinking “outside the box.” Pastors contrive ways to be relevant, which usually means talking like the teens did a decade ago, dressing like a Gap garage sale, and preaching personality, not pericopes.

Churches are built to look like entertainment venues where programs, not truths, are the focus of church shoppers' attention, where there is no sin that can't be covered with the blush of semantics, technology, and the latest fad, and where blushing is a forgotten art. And let me tell you about the danger in that, brothers and sisters. When you base your faith or church home on feelings and fads, you will be left high and dry when feelings and fads change as they always do. I have heard too many times that our fellow Lutherans have left the Lutheran church for another because they could feel God at the new church, or hear His whisper, or see Him, or touch Him, etc. I have some unfortunate news. God does not whisper. He speaks clearly and unwaveringly through the mouth of His called servants and the Word. Unless you are Elijah, there is no promise of God that He will whisper in your ear; but there is a promise He will work through the mouths of His servants and through the written Word. The only place we can feel and touch God is in the Sacraments: in the cleansing waters of Holy Baptism and in the Lord's Supper. The only way to taste God, is to eat and drink His very Body and Blood. And that never changes. That will never leave you high and dry, because that is based on the Truth, and the Truth Himself is present there. Stop being Marthas. Stop being distracted, and sit at His feet!

The Greek word St. Luke uses in the Holy Gospel literally means that Martha was “drawn away in many directions.” Sound familiar? Here was Jesus sitting as a guest in her house and what was she doing? Running around like a chicken with her head cut off. The sad thing is, however, that we can't really blame her. After all, we all would want to make Jesus feel at home, wouldn't we. Martha just went about it the wrong way.

How often don't we also manage to make Jesus feel at home the wrong way? We read every self-help book there is about building a Christian home, we go to every activity the church offers, we volunteer for 87 different positions, or we spend so much time trying to be a great pastor that we don't ever get

around to the most important thing: hearing what God has to say in the first place and learning how He would best have us serve Him. We get so busy giving to God that we don't let Him give anything to us.

There is one fundamental flaw in all of this Martha-ing, and the Lord kindly demonstrates it. Even when Christ comes to us as a guest, He is still the Host. He is the one running the party. He is the one with the most important stories to be told. He is the one who washes. He is the one who serves the meal. He is the one who gives the instructions. He is the one who cleans up the messes we create. Mary, by God's good grace recognized this and chose to sit at her Master's feet and listen. She knew what she learned now would be something she would take with her all her days. She knew that what she learned now, even if it didn't all make sense yet, would prove indispensable later.

Have you been a Martha? If so, now what do we do? Is all lost? Are the consequences of our busyness irreparable? Of course not. First, stop confusing need with want. Not everything you want to do needs to be done. Second, get your priorities straight. Unless you're drawing sap from the Vine through Word and Sacrament, you're going to run out of juice. Third, spend less time figuring out how to be a Christian father, mother, or child, if you are one, and simply be one. I know the prospect is scary, but it's not as hard as it seems. By virtue of Baptism, you are all Christians. By virtue of the laws of nature, many of you are fathers, mothers, and children. Hence, you already are Christian fathers, mothers, and children. Pretty easy, huh? Now just keep being that and keep soaking in the only Christian literature a father, mother, or child actually needs: the Bible. Those of you whose names are on more than a few schedules here at Christ, consider how many funerals we've had over the years, many of them for people whose names were on the same schedules, and notice that the church is still here. If there comes a time when volunteering for roles at church begins to keep you from the roles you've been placed in by God Himself, God trumps the paper on the bulletin boards, and you need to serve as God has called you, not as you have volunteered. For those of you whose names aren't ever on the bulletin boards, or even in the communion records all that often, reevaluate where your time is going and consider giving those weary volunteers, and yourselves, a rest once in a while.

Most importantly, however, we all need to remember that who we are, what we do, and how we do it, always must flow from the "one thing needful," and that is the gospel in Word and Sacrament. Thursdays and Sundays, the Lord of Hosts invites us to be His guests. He washes our worries and doubts away in our Baptism, which we relive in confession and absolution. He sets the table for our weary souls and feeds us with new life and forgiveness, acting as both the Host and the Supper at the same time. He tells us stories that will change our lives—true stories, stories that mean more than we can ever imagine. He cleans up the messes we leave behind, as we cast our burdens on His cross and take up His easy yoke. He promises that the portion we have received will not be taken from us, but will work in us the very end of our faith: eternal salvation.

In our Old Testament lesson, Abraham unwittingly served as a host to angels, and to the Lord Himself. Before he even knew what was happening, Abraham was no longer a host at all, but a guest at God's unraveling of His plan and promise of a Savior. Abraham, who had intended to give great gifts to his guests, quickly became the guest himself and the recipient of the greatest gift of all: God promise, which never returns empty.

My friends, fellow Marthas, make Christ an ever-present guest in your life and before you know it, Christ will be no guest at all, but the host of a life you now live by, in, and for Him, who gives you new life in Word and Sacrament. Don't believe me? Read John chapter eleven and hear this same distracted Martha later boldly confess at her brother's death: "Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." Even Martha learned to love the one thing needful. Its never too late.

Are you anxious about many things? Leave them here today. Let Christ have them. And let Him give you what you really need the most: Himself. Amen.