

Talk for First Sunday Service - 3rd April on 5th Sunday of Lent - John Ch 12 v 1-8. Caroline Seaton

Our reading today is a familiar one. We can all identify with being a Martha or a Mary can't we. A friend is coming for a meal and the sisters were getting ready for the visitor.

I don't know what it's like in your household when someone is visiting? Dusting, making sure the bathroom is tidy and clean, hoovering? It can be a whirl wind of activity. And Mum saying don't mess it up!!!!

Mary and Martha were getting ready for their visitor to drop in. A very important person, and that was Jesus. The very one who had raised their brother Lazarus from the dead. You can just picture the scene. The women preparing the venue whilst Lazarus waited for his friend to arrive. He arrives and although we don't hear this from our reading you can sense there is tension growing between the sisters as to who is doing what, or not doing, as it would seem to Martha. You can almost hear that phrase – "it's not fair". Does that sound familiar!

I think from this reading God wants us to look at priorities. What one person sees as important someone else sees it differently depending on where we are coming from.

I'm going to show some pictures on the screen, and I want you to vote for which you prefer.

Let's see what you think.

On the screen are two items – can opener and games console.

Who would vote for can opener as a priority? Hands up. Or the games console? Hands up

A good novel or a map book? Hands up for Harry Potter. Hands up for Atlas?

A phone or a board game? Hands up etc

Watching TV or out walking in the countryside?

Play football or do homework?

We all make choices about things. We decide which we prefer or things which may be useful to us, and our choice will depend on our need or situation.

A can opener is needed to open that tin of beans! A games console is no good if you're not quick on the finger and don't know what you are supposed to be doing.

A map book if your lost on a journey! A novel is no good if you can't read.

Board games need at least 2 people, so you have company and interaction with another human

Fresh air and exercise are good for you.

Homework is good if you want to pass exams and do well at school.

We tend to choose things that are exciting and appeal to us.

In our reading we heard about God's priority for the two sisters. Martha was busy doing things whilst Mary was spending time with Jesus. Jesus said that Mary's choice was better. He knew his time on earth was coming close so to have Mary sit and listen to him was the right thing.

Sitting and spending time with someone is so very important – to hear how they are feeling and where they are in life.

I used to run a Parenting programme when at the children's centre and one of the sessions was about listening properly, and in this case, being attentive to children's wellbeing.

Your child gets in from school and they are in a bad mood – you are too busy to listen to them which compounds their frustration, and subsequent behaviour. They might not be able to tell you why they are in a bad mood but if you pay attention to them, sit with them and listen, it will help them calm down and become loveable again! God wants this more than anything – to sit with him.

Sitting and listening is so very important. Mary understood the need to do just that. And not only was she prepared to just sit, but she had also spent all her money on some nard which was a very expensive perfume – the coco channel of today possibly – to anoint Jesus' feet. Anoint meaning to rub in, to smooth oil on Jesus' feet and she did it as a sign of real love. A love for her not counting the cost. She gave her all.

But we hear Judas – the disciple who betrayed Jesus to the Romans, objecting to Mary spending money on such extravagances, suggesting that the money would have been better off being given to the poor. Sounds very noble of him doesn't it but he was the person holding the money bag so he could help himself to a tidy sum which he did quite often. Despite being a disciple of Jesus, he didn't understand the true meaning of being a follower, using the position to line his own pocket and to make his lifestyle comfortable. Certainly not following Mary and Martha's priorities, and certainly not what God desired!

Martha loved Jesus just as much as Mary, but she was a very practical person and the only way she could show her love was by the work of her hands – cooking and cleaning. She also gave what she could, but in a very different way. The act of providing and doing was how she responded. Many people today serve God in very practical ways as we see in the support for refugees from countries where there is war and destruction for example.

We all have to make different decisions in our lives- the ones we looked at, at the start – a can opener or games console are very trivial decisions whilst others like doing homework are more important for our future. We make these choices on our priorities.

God wants us, as Christians, to follow the example of Mary and make their main priority to learn and obey the teaching of Jesus. Letting him into our lives.

And this is what Benjamin's family are doing this morning. By having him baptised he is given a sure foundation – prioritising God in his life which is the most important thing he could ask for.

And I'm going to end with a short poem, written by Annie Johnson Flint, a Christian poet.

Mary and Martha by Annie Johnson Flint

Mary was busy and hurried,
Serving the Friend divine,
Cleansing the cups and the platters,
Bringing the bread and the wine;
But Martha was careful and anxious,
Fretted in thought and in word,
She had no time to be learning
While she was serving the Lord,
For Martha was "cumbered" with serving
Martha was "troubled" with "things" –
Those that would pass with the using—
She was forgetting her wings.

Do we strive for "things" in possession,
And toil for the perishing meat,
Neglecting the one thing needful—
Sitting at Jesus' feet?
Service is good when He asks it,
Labor is right in its place,
But there is one thing better—
Looking up into His face;
There is so much He would tell us,
Truths that are precious and deep;
This is the place where He wants us,
These are the things we can keep.

But Mary was quiet and peaceful,
Learning to love and to live,
Mary was learning His precepts,
Mary was letting Him give—
Give of the riches eternal,
Treasures of mind and of heart;
Learning the mind of the Master,
Choosing the better part.
Do we ever labor at serving
Till voices grow fretful and shrill,
Forgetting how to be loving,
Forgetting how to be still?