

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost • July 21, 2019<sup>i</sup>

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Braun Campbell

Luke 10:38-42

“The Good Portion”

What's your calendar looking like these days?

Fifty years ago, the Eagle landed on the moon. This week, summer landed on our national capital area, and it landed **hard**. I hope that you've been able to spend time inside, rather than in the excessive heat that has been hitting our part of the country. But staying out of the heat can be a challenge around here with the running-around that requires you to hop in the car or ride the train to get to your job, or the store, or your next appointment. Sitting around to rest and recuperate doesn't seem to be big on the radar in our neck of the woods.

It might be summer, but that doesn't mean that things have slowed down around here! In the week ahead, we're launching this year's Vacation Bible School, *Miraculous Mission: Jesus Saves the World*. We're going to be welcoming in around one hundred students – most of whom aren't otherwise connected with our congregation – and celebrating the good news that God loves and cares for them. We just had a group of our young people return from the LCMS Youth Gathering, and Pastor Meehan is currently away at our church body's national convention. Facilities improvements and maintenance have been continuing around our campus all this time, and we're also looking ahead to the National Night Out event and the start of a new year of Christian Education in September.

So, what's your calendar looking like these days?

I'm guessing that it's not too different from ours. Even if school's out, you've probably got camps and big trips that need coordinating. Work continues for many of us, whether it's a summer job or a regular position that requires your time and attention. And I've found that those of you who are retired can somehow be even busier than you were when you had a full-time job. Calendars get booked up! If you want to get together with your friends who live around here, how far in advance do you have to get on each other's calendars? In days gone by, it didn't seem so hard to meet up and spend unhurried time with others in your social circle. But now?

**Here's a question for you** – and you can let me know your answer after today's service: Would it be better for a guest of yours to show up unexpectedly (and then you just make do with what you have on hand), or would you rather know about it in advance so you can apply your time and energy into all the preparations needed to make it *just right*?

Mary and Martha didn't have that choice. Jesus, along with his disciples and the number of people who were following along with him, descended upon their village – the village of Bethany, according to John's Gospel. Martha welcomes Jesus, and maybe his disciples, too, into their home, practicing the generous hospitality that was so important in their culture. Look back to the Lord's visiting Abraham in today's reading from Genesis 18. It's a great example of this attitude of hospitality, providing gracious rest and refreshment for even strangers who were traveling across your land. So as Martha welcomes Jesus in, she's got to get ready so she could serve him. If you got the chance to host a last-minute meal for a special guest who just happened to come to town – and you couldn't call a caterer! – wouldn't you do your best to make that happen?

It would have been highly unusual for a rabbi to accept a woman's invitation to come and teach in her home, but that's exactly what Jesus did. They were getting to spend time with the Teacher, hearing the news of God's kingdom, His reigning, come near. Well... at least Mary was. Martha was serving, readying a meal, preparing the portions of food that would feed their guests.

Martha was doing exactly what was expected: being a good host, serving her guests. She's trying to do good stuff to show her appreciation for Jesus coming to her home. Isn't she doing the right thing? I don't doubt that she felt burdened by everything that needed to be done. Our English translation of Luke's account says, “Martha was *distracted* with much serving,” but the literal translation would be “Martha was *dragged around* with much serving.” It's work to prepare and host a meal for a group, and Martha would probably have preferred to be sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to him as her sister was doing.

Martha gets a bad rap, don't you think? Jesus knows that she was anxious and troubled about many things; he says as much. What about you? What are those things that make you anxious and troubled? Is

it your calendar that keeps dragging you around from day to day? Is it your working environment, or issues in your family? It doesn't seem like we really need to search around all that hard for things to make us anxious and troubled these days. Martha would probably feel right at home with us. So many demands are clamoring for our time and energy, pulling us this way and that. And you want to do the right thing, the good stuff.

Jesus knows exactly what Martha's experiencing. He doesn't rebuke or reprimand her when she comes to him with her request for Mary to lend a hand; instead, Jesus lovingly and kindly redirects her. He turns her from the many things that are dragging her around and calls her to come and enjoy **the "one thing" – the best thing – that's necessary for life: close fellowship with God.** That's the same thing that King David ranks as his highest goal in Psalm 27(:4), just a few verses before today's psalmody begins: "*One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.*" That's the good portion.

So hear this: You're right where you need to be today. And you don't have to do anything else to receive the good portion. Jesus has come to be with you; he has entered in. Martha, trying to do the right thing, the expected thing, got it backwards. Jesus was the host who'd come to serve, and Martha was the invited guest. So are you.

**Let Jesus serve you first, before you try to serve him.** You and I can serve Jesus by serving others in his name, but we can only do that **if he first serves us.** If you recall last week's Gospel reading that included the Good Samaritan story, Jesus was responding to a lawyer's question of "Who is my neighbor?" That man was trying to justify himself before God. He got it backwards, too. It's God who justifies. Jesus serves us there, too. He makes us right in the Father's sight, doing all the good things for us. Giving himself, he prepares your place and my place at his table.

In a time where many things will seek to distract you, to drag you around in anxiety and trouble your mind, know that Jesus is greater than all of them. Let him serve you first, as he's doing right now, before you try to serve him – here or anywhere else. You've got a seat at the table, where Jesus is the host and you are the guest.

You've chosen the good portion today, and it will not be taken away from you.

**Amen.**

---

<sup>i</sup> Passage for memory:

*But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." – Luke 10:41-42*