

## Balance, Burnout and Blessings

Luke 10:38-42

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/balance-burnout-and-blessings/>

Not long ago, a friend of mine was describing his grown daughter, a very busy young lady. He meant to say, "She is great at multi-tasking." What he said may have been more accurate: "She is great at mega-tasking." Mega-tasking! A good compound word. Shall we coin it? Martha knew about it. Verse 40 says she was distracted by her many tasks. The word "distracted" means overburdened, dragged around by forces not of our choosing. Does that apply to anyone here this morning?

How can we tell we've moved into the unhealthy phase of mega-tasking? Peter Scazzero has written about the warning signals that we have strayed from our God-given limits. Here are a few: 1) My body is in a knot. 2) My mind can't stop racing. 3) I am driving too fast. 4) I am not able to be fully present with people. 5) I am irritable about simple tasks. 6) I am skipping my time with God [*The Emotionally Healthy Church*, p. 150]. Said simply, this story tells us that being busy proves nothing--it doesn't make us more spiritual, more like Jesus, more productive, more important, or happier!

And Martha's busyness comes into sharp contrast when we see her sister, Mary. Mary is contemplative and worshipful. She isn't concerned about helping get dinner on the table. Jesus says she has chosen the better part (v. 42). What is Mary's "better part?" Just two things: Sitting at Jesus' feet (the posture of a follower) and listening (the attitude of a follower, v. 39). If for no other reason, this story is in our Bibles to get us away from notions of a works salvation. The better part is to trust God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. And it's the better part because it can't be taken away. In other words, someday, when Mary looks back, she will ask herself, "Did it matter?" That's how we sort priorities! We ask, "Will this matter in 5, 10, 50 years?" Getting a sense proportion--what is important--may be a lost art. In light of the latest craze in our culture, I was tempted to put on Facebook an announcement: "We don't have Pokeman Go but we do have the Way, the Truth and the Life! Francis of Assisi defined contemplation as taking long, loving looks at what is real.

But...but...having said all that, the Bible is all about balance. And every Bible text should be read in context. The context of this story and the famous Good Samaritan story is the question in v. 25 and the answer in v. 27: What must I do to inherit eternal life? Answer: Love God and love others. The Good Samaritan story illustrates loving others; this story illustrates loving God. There is a rhythm to following Jesus, a back-and-forth. If one is neglected, the other is off balance, too. To decide which one to leave out is like asking which wing of the airplane you wish to fall off.

Fred Craddock captures this balance brilliantly in his Luke commentary. We can be so busy in God's word that we forget to get busy and serve. Or we can be so busy serving that we don't take time to listen. To the lawyer in v. 25 who wanted to spend all his time studying, Jesus said, look for broken and battered lives around you and serve. To a woman so intent on a meal being just right, he said sit down and learn. Then Craddock writes, if you were to ask Jesus which one of these applies to me, he would probably answer, "Yes" [*Interpretation--Luke*, p. 152]. For all of us, it's not a matter of which is correct, Mary or Martha, but more of a matter of which at this moment is right in my life? It's a matter of spiritual discernment. Perhaps staying in the moment is the key. Just as the Levite and priest who passed by on the other side in the Good Samaritan story (v. 31) failed to live in the moment, so Martha made the same mistake--missing the moment. Sometimes, the moment calls for loving others in the ditch; sometimes it calls for loving God in attentive worship.

And by the way, this grand narrative of loving God and neighbor is the theme of all scripture. As Jesus-followers, we must live this alternative story and never allow the narrative of violence and hate to dominate. We must never succumb to hating blacks, whites, browns, police, gays, immigrants or friends who betray us. We're called to live God's love narrative!

There is another help offered us in discerning the moment--the choices between loving God and loving others. God in infinite wisdom provided a mechanism for us to evaluate priorities, keep perspective and balance between work and rest. In fact, it's so important, it's woven into the Ten Commandments. It's called Sabbath rest.

The great Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel wrote that the first holy thing God created was not a people or a place. The first holy thing God created was a day, the Sabbath. It's a great cathedral of time, time which creates space for us to worship and rest. And to keep balance. Martin Luther reminded us that the purpose of Sabbath is not simply to stop work, but to allow God time to work in us. Isn't that how we come to follow Jesus? Allow God to work. Isn't that how we continue the Christian journey? Allow God space and time to work. And then we work. Balance and blessing.