

First Presbyterian Church  
Life Lessons from Luke: Loving  
Rev. Bethany Peerbolte  
July 17, 2022

Isaiah 30:18-22; Luke 10:38-42

I have a theory. I think Jesus was actually a very clear and detailed teacher. The reason his lessons come off as vague in scripture is that the disciples were terrible at remembering what Jesus said. Hence, moments like this where Jesus says, there are many things but only one thing is needed, and Mary chooses correctly. Like WHAT is the one thing, JESUS!?! No need to leave us guessing, tell us the one thing. What was the thing Mary chose, and then we will choose that thing also. Alas, all we have is one thing.

Complicating matters further there is a significant translation debate around the thing Mary chose. Translators either have Jesus saying Mary's choice is better, or he says Mary's choice is good. There is a big difference there.

If Mary has chosen the better part, it implies that Martha has chosen a lesser option. "Better" hints at the existence of a hierarchy, or even a right and a wrong way of doing something. Better is always how it was when I was growing up.

The second flag that better is not what Jesus meant is if that is true and Jesus believes Martha has chosen something that is not worthy, it seems odd that Jesus doesn't correct Martha's actions. It wouldn't be shocking for Jesus to redirect behavior. After he protects a woman from being stoned, he turns to her and redirects the choices she had been making. We don't see Jesus make a correction with Martha.

For these reasons many translators consider the word "good" to be closer to what Jesus meant. And I agree. "Good" allows for Mary to have chosen correctly and for Martha to have also chosen correctly. One is not better than the other, they are both good choices.

There is nothing wrong or better about either choice. Jesus honors both women in the choices they have made even though the one thing they chose to do is not the same thing.

Mary and Martha are different people and Jesus knows what will inspire them and what will drain them, and that those things are completely different for each sister. Jesus also knows that the values of the community make it easy for Martha to choose to be the host, while the things that bring Mary joy are not seen as worthy choices for a woman to make. I would bet Mary often

found herself either in trouble for not staying in her place or forced to endure the draining work her sister naturally enjoyed.

Mary choosing to sit and listen to Jesus was a rebellious act. Mary chooses to do the thing that will feed her soul despite what anyone else thought. She chooses her own well-being. To her sister, this looks like a selfish choice but Jesus points out that Martha expecting her sister to do something simply because it is what Martha prefers to do is also pretty selfish.

By refusing Martha's request, Jesus is declaring that a woman's place is in the classroom, AND he is saying a woman's place is in the kitchen. Jesus wants them to choose that which will feed their soul, choose the thing that uses their unique gifts, and choose what will lead them to a deeper relationship with God. As long as they both had the opportunity to look left, and look right, and hear the voice say "this is the way, walk in it" then it's all good.

The shiny images and idols Isaiah dreams about us scattering and saying "away with you" are still around. We see the silver and gold over there and we go over there. We don't always listen for the voice to tell us which way; we see a way that is successful and we go for it.

We've all done it. We all have at least one choice that we made because it was cool or we thought it would get us closer to a personal goal. For some of us, there is picture evidence: 80's hair, 90's fashion, and those Sears family portraits. They seemed like the right choice at the time - those other people look cool. Picture evidence might be bad but there are worse consequences. Choices made under peer pressure or working somewhere that required out-of-character behavior to get the promotion. The silver and gold facades of success and fitting in and doing what people want us to do are so shiny we don't even notice that there are other options.

That thing you have been beating yourself up about, turn the other way. That's probably not your path. That goal you set that you keep slipping back on, take a moment, look around. Maybe there is another way to get there. There is so much in this world that will encourage us to barrel through and endure. None of those voices are Jesus' voice.

Jesus says there is value in the hustle and there is value in rest. What brings them joy, might not be something you enjoy. It's okay to choose the things that will be good for your soul. As long as the choices come after looking left and looking right and listening for "this is the way."