Course #4 = Savoring Jesus

Luke 10:38-42

October 21, 2018

When you are invited to a person house for dinner, what is the proper etiquette for bringing a gift? We turn of course to our source of all things proper: Emily Post in order to get our answer.

JBYOTK: Gifts aren’t usually taken to large, formal dinners, especially if you don’t know the host well, but a moral casual gathering, a gift can be a great gesture of appreciation, but are far from required.

But if you want to bring a gift, what is appropriate? What are acceptable gifts?

Which of these items are the more acceptable gifts?

In today’s passage Jesus was invited to a dinner party and what He offered to the hostess will cause us to ponder if it was accepted or unacceptable. Our text is Luke 10 and it is the account of Mary and Martha. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn to the third gospel…

Like our previous studies in this series, we are looking at what principles we learn from Jesus’ interaction around the table and how He drew people into community together.

My prayer and longing is for CAC to be the church that God intended for us to be--a community that celebrates grace so that we can be broken together so that we can find our wholeness and identity in Christ and what He has done for us rather than trying to find it in what we do—which is exactly the lesson that Martha learns.

This is our fourth course (of seven). We have already learned about being a welcoming community where forgiveness is freely offered and compassion and care are extended so that others can see their need for Jesus.

Following up from last week’s main lesson on the feeding of the multitudes which taught us that Jesus came to offer himself to those who could not provide for themselves, we once again discover that it is all about Jesus and when we let others things replace Him, when we get anxious about what we have to do, then we’ve lost the ultimate purpose for our community.

The fourth course is traditionally the cleansing course. It is a small dish of lemon or lime sorbet designed to cleanse the pallet and prepare it for the feast that is to come next.

It is appropriate that today’s lesson focuses on Jesus who cleanses us and prepares us to receive the feast that he has prepared for us.

I’m going to read the passage, pray for the Holy Spirit to open our minds to receive His message from this passage and then we’ll begin to look at what we learn from this meal with Jesus.

38 While they were traveling, He entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39 She had a sister named Mary, who also sat at the Lord’s feet and was listening to what He said. 40 But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, and she came up and asked, “Lord, don’t You care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So tell her to give me a hand.”

41 The Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Let’s Pray:

You’ll notice by looking at the headings in this chapter that Jesus has been busy traveling and teaching and he arrives in the village of Bethany, the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus after a very hectic time on the road.

We know from Scripture that this family had a special connection with Jesus. They had become close friends during Jesus earthly ministry.  He had a profound love for the family.

The text tells us that Jesus had come to their house at Martha’s invitation.  She was the one who welcomed Him in. She was the hostess and from what we’ve learned in previous studies, this gathering probably wasn’t just Jesus and the immediate family.

One writer suggests that there could have been as many as a hundred people. It could be possible that the seventy-two who had just rejoined Jesus after their itinerant ministry were still with him. And considering his fame at this point, no doubt his visit attracted a number of locals.

And after Jesus welcomed all to come and gather and belong, He then began to help them to believe by teaching. And the crowd listened to Jesus as he taught—that is all but Martha because she was too busy to listen. Luke describes her as distracted by her many tasks as hostess.

I’m sure no one here would judge Martha for being busy. If you’ve ever hosted an event, you know how important it is to have everything right. Think about it: How distracted would you be if a hundred people crowded into your home?

And remember the value that Jewish culture had on hospitality. And then remember that it’s Jesus in your home. He’s the Messiah, the most important person you know; the most important person anyone could know.

Martha was certainly distracted by how her place looked, and maybe a little concerned how about she would feed this crowd or how many trips must be made to the well because remember there’s no running water or prepackaged food or even any local shops to run to. No wonder Martha is distracted.

In fact, how many of us look at this account, and be honest, think that Martha is right to complain to Jesus that Mary is slacking in her work?

While Martha scurries around the house distracted by the work, Mary isn’t distracted at all. She is completely calm and able to ignore all the hostess responsibilities that she should certainly have shared with her sister.

But there she is. While Martha is running about making sure there is food and drink and lighting and everything else that was needed…there’s little Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus.

And that irritated Martha. She was working like crazy while Mary just sat there. Who do you tend to identify with at this point? Are you a Martha who tends to be busy, anxious, and distracted; or are you the Mary who is able to ignore the distractions of life and listen to Jesus and delight in Him—no matter what is going on around you.

I’ve been reading a book about community development and what church community should look like. In the chapter on service there was this story recorded by the author:

“I was speaking at a conference and during a break I found myself standing next to three women who were talking about their church. I wasn’t trying to eavesdrop, but could not help overhearing their conversation.

“we were getting ready for the luncheon, preparing food and setting up the room for our congregational meeting, and our pastor just stood there while we all worked,” one said with a wry smile.

“He was just standing sipping his coffee while se set up the chairs.”

One of the ladies responded, “well, I guess your pastor doesn’t do chairs.” They all laughed, but it was one of those funny but also sad laughs.

Just like those women looking at the pastor while he drank his coffee, Martha would be in and out of the room and each time perhaps look at Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. It doesn’t take too much imagination for us to think what Martha was probably pondering in her heart.

Martha probably considered Mary to be either lazy or just neglecting her responsibilities. Mary was acting like a millennial in the first millennia. You see there really isn’t anything new under the sun.

Exasperated and at her whit’s end, Martha finally appealed to Jesus hoping that he would rebuke Mary and tell her to help out: verse 40, “Lord, don’t You care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So tell her to give me a hand…tell her to get out in the kitchen and help.

Let’s pause for a moment. Was Martha wrong? She was the hostess in charge of the household. She wanted everything to be just right.  She was a conscientious and considerate hostess, and these are admirable traits.  Much in her behavior was commendable.

The Scriptures are clear that service to others is good. Hospitality is a spiritual gift that is to be practiced. It is good to make people feel welcomed and to do your best to make others feel special and like they belong.

Jesus even had parables that illustrated the blessing of serving. In Matthew 24 he relates our service here on earth and his desire to see us busy when he returns.

 Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. (Matthew 24:45–46)

But in this case Jesus didn’t commend Martha, in fact, He rebukes her. Verses 41-42.

The Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41–42).

To just about everyone else present, they would have thought that Martha was doing what she was supposed to be doing and doing it well; that she was serving out of servant heart. But Jesus discerned differently. He saw that Martha was serving out of anxiety, not grace.

What was making Martha anxious? We know she was anxious about “many things.”

Perhaps we only need to think about our own heart to guess what Martha was worried about. Perhaps she was anxious over how she pleased or impressed Jesus and her guests.

Maybe she was troubled at the thought that her home and serving might reflect poorly on her and her family.

I’ve had those thoughts more than I care to admit. If I don’t do \_\_\_\_, others will think I’m \_\_\_\_. Lazy, ungrateful, not working hard enough…You might be surprised to learn how much of ministry can done from a wrong motivation.

Jesus sees the heart of our service and what Jesus saw was that love wasn’t motivating Martha’s serving. Anxiety was and her anxiety blinded her to the “one thing necessary” — listening to Jesus.

This kind of anxiety is very subtle. It has a selfish root but its fruit looks deceptively like unselfishness. It’s the desire for approval dressed up to look like a humble servant.

It’s my caring what you think of me dressed up to look like my caring for you. It can be so subtle that we don’t see it clearly. It looks so much like the right thing that we can believe it is the right thing. (John Bloom, Whom Are You Serving)

But Jesus affirms Mary because she had chosen the “one thing necessary,” the “good portion.” At that moment, Mary was more focused with Jesus than the things of this world. She cared more about what Jesus said than what others thought of her or her home. And because of this Jesus commended her choice not to serve.

Jesus’ table is a safe place where you don’t need to impress people. You don’t need to be anxious about how you look to others.

But listen to this my friends, Jesus’ table is also a safe place where Jesus can gently rebuke and correct you when it is necessary.

Jesus’ gentle rebuke of Martha was an act of love. We are all Marthas at times. And through this correction Jesus is asking us: whom are we serving in our serving? Who are we trying to impress and why? What is our motivation?

I’m certain at that moment Martha thought she was doing the right thing. That's why she appealed to Jesus.

My friends there is a constant battle we face to let urgent demands distract us from the good of listening to Jesus. There is so much to do. So many needs to meet, so many problems to fix.

We tend to value the volume of things accomplished, and call that "productivity." Look at what I accomplished this week. Look how busy I am for Jesus. Look at my check list.

God values "fruitfulness" (John 15:5) but what makes us fruitful in our ministry and service to God and others is not busyness but that we pause from our busyness and listen to and delight in Jesus.

One of the things I learned this summer and obviously didn’t learn enough and so God gave me more time to learn it is this: listening often doesn’t feel like doing, but it might just be the most important thing God wants you to do.

No one’s motives are ever completely pure. But when we feel compelled to “serve” out of a self-conscious anxiety over what others think, it’s likely we are serving our own glory and not Jesus’ glory and Jesus seeks to free us from this slavery by inviting us to stop working and to rest at his feet, and listen to him.

So why wasn’t Mary distracted? Because Mary delighted in Jesus. She was captivated. I don’t know if Mary was aware of Martha’s busyness, she simply couldn’t tear herself away from Jesus. And Jesus commended her on having chosen the good portion.

And because she delighted in Jesus, it determined her actions, her priorities and passions. Simply stated we order our lives by what we love which goes back to my favorite definition of sin from Augustine that sin is disordered love.

What we love most is what we make time for, what we spend our money on, what we praise and share with others and if that isn’t Jesus then the Scriptures warn us that our life will be disordered and out of balance.

So as we welcome people to the table, we offer forgiveness, compassion and care which means that we offer both encouragement and correction so that whatever else happens at the table, we offer them Jesus.

To be a community of grace means that we don’t just ignore sins and weakness, but that in love for one another and in a desire to see each of us walking closely to the Lord, we offer gentle rebukes…

But, because we are practicing grace we know that it is for our good and that there is forgiveness and compassion available because what we are most concerned about is Jesus and everyone knowing Jesus and being like Jesus.

When you invite someone to church, when you share your faith with someone, you are inviting them to know Jesus. You are asking them to sit at the feet of one in whom they can delight in with all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength.

But my friends, how often is that the church instead of helping us delight in Jesus, offers us an opportunity to serve out of glory to man instead of glory to God.

How often is that we come to church so that we look good, rather than letting God lead us to brokenness so that we find wholeness.

Martha needed to be broken that night so that she too could find wholeness in Christ. But let’s be honest, many of us are too busy trying to look good, to look like we have it all together…that we miss the best portion: we miss Jesus.

We’re so busy doing ministry, completing our lists, that we fail to do what Jesus longs for all of us to do: to sit at His feet, to delight in Him and listen.

So let me just offer some quick practical ideas that aren’t new, but maybe where you are right now, one of them will stick in a way that it hasn’t stuck before so that you can learn to savor Jesus more.

 --How can you delight in one you do not know? You need to know Jesus more and you do that by spending time with Jesus – daily time in the word, prayer, get out and listen to God (online is a wealth of resources); go for a walk and just talk with Jesus

 --Get around those who love Jesus: Life Groups, Sunday School, go for a coffee with someone you know is more mature in their faith than you.

 --Take faith filled risks where you are being pushed to trust Jesus more

 --Be satisfied with Jesus rather than seeking satisfaction in the things Jesus gives: look to Him and not his blessings. See Jesus for who He is—your savior, redeemer, friend, brother, coming king…

May we all slow down and sit at the table with Jesus. So many today are busy around the table—working hard to impress Jesus with their good works, their busyness. But Jesus wants you to rest at the table. Stop trying to impress Jesus and instead sit with Jesus.

You see it isn’t at all about me and what I do or what I look like. It is all about Jesus. So let us chose the right thing, the good thing and listen to Jesus, delight in Jesus so that we can be like Jesus.