Scripture: Luke 10:38-42

38 Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. **39** She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. **40** But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' **41** But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; **42** there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

Sermon: Stop, Drop, and Listen

We've all felt the variety of feelings that come with having company. You may be a person who dreads that time of year or even that week where the house has to be cleaned, among so many other tasks, and it seems like you will never get it done. Then, while the company is there, you feel like you have to do everything to make sure their stay is perfect…or at least pleasant. Or you may be the person who is just excited for the company to come and visit. Instead of worrying about all the details, you focus on the interactions and the shared laughs and deep conversations.

No matter where we find ourselves, sometimes in our lives we find it hard to be truly present with people, whether they are the people we see every day or the people who come and visit for a shorter period of time. Part of the reason for this is that we, as humans, have gotten used to always thinking ahead. We are distracted. What is the next thing we need to do? How do I prepare for the next task? Maybe, we even think, Wow, they don't know how good they have it. Or even the occasional, is it almost time to go to bed. My bed sounds so good right now. Rarely do we do one thing at a time. Almost never do we stop, quiet our minds, enter silence, and just listen.

In our scripture passage today, we find ourselves seeing two different types of people. We first hear of Martha. We see one who is duty-driven, task-oriented, follows the rules, and above all, who is just trying to provide a room and meals

for Jesus. Oftentimes, she is blamed for trying to hold her sister, Mary, accountable to the societal norms, and even is shamed for putting her own anxieties on her sister. Some even think she was trying to bring guilt to Jesus, but there is some compassion for Martha. There is nothing wrong with the hospitality Martha wanted to offer. There were no shortcuts to food preparation in those days. She was trying to be all that Jesus deserved.

And then we see Mary. The younger, less responsible, societal-challenger woman who just wanted to soak in all that Jesus had to offer. Mary was the sister who was praised by Jesus. Mary, unlike Martha, represents the marginalized person, the unlikely hero. She is the one who represents those who go against societal standards to sit at Jesus's feet and listen like a male disciple. In her neglectfulness, she historically brought shame on her household. Yet, in all of the shame, Jesus praised Mary for her willingness to forsake everything else for him.

And most of the time, that is where the story ends. Shock to the system. You see, Jesus said go and do to some but he praised Mary for sitting and listening. The life of a disciple requires both. In Jesus's correction to Martha, it is important to notice that Jesus does not criticize Martha's actions. He diagnoses her soul. He shares what she needs in order to live out a more full, life-giving life, and live more the disciple that is desired.

What does it take to live the life of this kind of disciple? Humility.

Friends, we are invited into a life of humility, where listening to God, listening to another is how we live. And after we have listened, then we go and do action. Then, we come back and listen, and then we go. In this cycle of relationship. For when we listen, we love.

Humility in fully present listening takes the focus off ourselves. We need humility to become our constant state of being, and in that understanding, we

can grow in love. In that constant state of being humble, we give God's grace clear and unobstructed pathways into our lives. Filled with humility, God's love can enter, and then we no longer feel angry or embittered towards others. We appreciate the fact that they have their own struggles, just as we do. We listen to their stories of heartbreak and joy, of their own bitterness and peace. We are urged by Jesus to find time amid the chaos of our lives to find time to sit at Jesus's feet and listen, to sit at the table with others and listen.

So, we must ask ourselves, how do I actually listen in my conversations?

We can ask ourselves these important questions:
Am I looking into the eyes of the person I am listening to?
Am I listening to them just to respond, or am I fully hearing them?
Am I in tune with their body language and non-verbal cues?
Am I distracted by my own life?

When people sit at the table (both figuratively and physically) with us, we are welcoming them into a relationship. And not just relationships with us, but with God. That is a big responsibility.

It's true that some stories may be more than our emotions or patience can handle, but God gave us grace to sit with people and listen anyway. So, friends, this week, may we remember to stop what we are doing, drop the other things of this world, and really listen to those talking around us. Amen.