

## RESPONDING TO JESUS

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai, Sunday 17 July 2016

Luke 10:38-42  
[MW16-22]

While that reading from Luke is still fresh in our minds let's do a quick survey

- remember there are no right/wrong answers  
this incident is recorded to help us as followers of Jesus, so
- who thinks that it is fair enough for Martha to complain?  
who thinks that Mary was indeed doing the best thing?  
who thinks Jesus was doing okay to praise Mary and scold Martha?
- who considers they are more like Mary?  
who considers themselves more like Martha?

As a way of getting into this incident and letting it work on us

- I invite you to do a little something different with me:  
imagine I am a reporter for one of those TV programmes like  
Story, Seven Sharp, or 60 Minutes
- I am going to come and ask your opinion about this incident  
who you agree with, and why, and what you think of Jesus' response
  
- so please take a few seconds to think while I prepare  
[hat, microphone, PP Slide]

Good morning everyone. I'm Ivan O'Stile for "News at When", and we are coming to you live from outside a house in Bethany where there has been some kind of incident with the occupiers – sisters Martha and Mary – who were entertaining that young, up and coming preacher and somewhat controversial speaker, Jesus. Let's see if we can get some reaction from those who saw and heard what went on ...

[ask people, get reaction, give "prize"]

... well, there you have it. Another "incident" with this Jesus, and on this occasion two sisters, Martha and Mary. It's up to you out there just what you make of it. And now, back to the studio. This has been Ivan O'Stile for "News at When".

Thank you for your participation

- it helps us "get inside" this incident  
there's a danger that we think we know it so well we don't really hear and see  
and feel just what is going on
- so let's try to keep all that somehow around us as I make some further comments

You know, I have actually been to Martha's house!

- she's someone I have not seen for a while and and want to catch up with  
she has warmly welcomed me and put out the best china with real linen serviettes  
there is scrumptious baking and every time I look my cup is miraculously refilled
- all the time I am there she pops up to check the oven, the fridge, the washing  
talking while moving around, until I finally exclaim:  
"for heaven's sake, will you just sit down and talk with me!"
- after all I did come to visit her, not her cakes, dishes and linen

I have also been to Mary's house!

- the minute I was about to knock on the door  
she grabbed my arm and lead me to the couch  
where we sit and talk and talk and talk

The time just goes by

- I am getting hungry and have to cough before even a glass of water is offered  
the room gets colder and darker  
the window is open but she doesn't get up to close it or turn on the heater
- I guess we had a real good catch up  
but I leave feeling cold, hungry and uncomfortable

In the usual way of looking at this incident, Mary and Martha come off like that

- the first century "Odd Couple"  
remember that? the Oscar Maddison and Felix Unger of their day
- which quite misses the mark, especially if taken to extremes  
but even so it's usually poor old Martha who gets the raw deal:  
too busy with practical things
- why can't she be more like Mary? why can't we?

That's the usual "moral" of the story

- but there is much more to this incident with Jesus and the two sisters  
than you might think
- there are some surprisingly deep revelations going on  
that first century followers of Jesus would have, after some initial amazement  
immediately picked up on and discussed
- so let us 21<sup>st</sup> century followers discover just what caught their attention

Notice where Mary is and what she does

- can anyone recall ... ??  
"Mary sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak"
- in first century Israel male and female roles were strictly demarcated  
women were confined to the kitchen and men to the living room  
but Mary boldly crosses the boundaries to sit at the feet of Jesus
- this was something only men were allowed to do!  
this is the customary symbolic sign that someone wished to be  
a master's student, something open only to men
- there is that verse in the Talmud that states:  
'It is better to burn the Torah than teach it to a woman'

Mary ignored all this and presented herself as a disciple

- and Jesus not only allowed it, but praised it!  
so once again Jesus turned the world upside down

Then there's Martha

- she perhaps comes across as someone who just can't sit still  
but this is to underestimate her position, her passion, her faith
- to gain a real appreciation of Martha we need to recall another well known story  
anybody think of it ... ???
- in John's gospel she and her sister Mary are grieving  
over the death of their brother Lazarus  
and it is forceful Martha who speaks up and dares to tell Jesus off:  
"Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died!"
- but even more than this, Martha goes on to make a stunning profession of faith  
every bit equal to that of Peter, who back in the village of Caesarea Philippi  
in answer to Jesus' question: "who do people say I am?"  
responded: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God"

Near her brother's burial place in the village of Bethany, Martha says the same thing

- after Martha's stinging complaint Jesus says:  
"Everyone who believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"
- Martha responded by saying:  
"Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God,  
the one coming into the world."
- proclaiming the same words and the same faith as Peter  
thereby becoming his female counterpart and co-founder of the faith!

You see, between the lines, something totally amazing is being said

- in this brief, familiar gospel incident  
with the two sisters who have a visit from Jesus
- do not let the Martha/Mary divide blind you to the revolutionary goings on here!  
the world was literally being turned upside down:  
Mary, a woman, a disciple at the feet of her master  
Martha, a woman, making a stunning declaration about who Jesus is

With Jesus nothing is ever straight forward

- so let's go back to the usual "moral" of the story  
and learn a new lesson here too
- firstly, to stop making a false division between the activism of Martha  
and the quietude of Mary – action and contemplation  
as if one were better than the other
- Jesus' saying that Mary had chosen the "better part"  
is not to say that what Martha is doing is wrong
- rather it is meant to underscore the *balance*  
as if Jesus were saying to the Marthas of the world:  
"stop for a moment and consider what you are doing and what you are doing it for"
- remember life's purpose  
how does your life and work fit into the larger picture???

These are questions crucial for everyone in any kind of ministry or service

- reminding us that more than fidelity and competence are required  
you have to keep a sense of mission and motivation  
and what it is that is at the centre of it all

When I was in the Nelson Diocese the Bishop recognised this

- every second year he provided a retreat for the stipendiary clergy  
when we were called out of our ministry units to a quiet place
- the Diocesan staff provided meals and practical needs  
the Bishop provided worship, guided Bible study  
opportunity for reflection and prayer
- a time of refreshment and renewal - so that, in short: in our work for the Lord,  
we would not forget to pay attention to the Lord in our work

Perhaps for us as followers of Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Luke 10:38-42 highlights:

- all "Marthas" and the centre evaporates and burnout sets in  
all "Marys" and charity and service go undone

This gospel calls for balance in our lives

- in Luke's gospel it immediately follows the parable of 'the Good Samaritan' where at the end Jesus says: "Go and do likewise"
- so yes indeed, do the works of mercy and compassion but don't let your good deeds become separated from the word of God which is after all the reason and motivation for everything

Preacher William J. Bausch puts it like this:

*These two pioneering women, Martha and Mary aren't opposites and we should not separate them. They are the yin and yang of a balanced spiritual life.*

Well we have been very "Martha" with lots of action and words

- let's now be more "Mary"

I invite you to be quiet and still and reflect

on this gospel incident, Martha and Mary and Jesus

on how this relates to you as a follower of Jesus

- in fact however and wherever the Holy Spirit leads you ...

... and after this time of reflection we will stand and affirm our faith together

Time of Reflection (no music, or PP slides etc)

Affirmation of Faith