

Meditations of the Heart - Reflections on the Scriptures

Psalm 19:14 *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

Pastor Matt Cadora

Week of October 11, 2009

There's Something About Mary...

Luke 10:38-42/John 12:1-3

Luke 10:38-42 38 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

This is one of three scenes in the Gospels that highlight these two sisters. The other two scenes are in the Gospel of John. These three scenes all feature the same elements concerning these two women. This scene in Luke is likely Jesus' first acquaintance with these women. Martha is working and Mary is sitting - at Jesus' feet listening to him.

The 11th chapter of the Gospel of John tells of the death of Lazarus (Mary and Martha's brother). When Jesus arrives, John writes of each sister individually and privately approaching Jesus and saying the exact same thing: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Legitimate questions, indeed. Martha actually has a more involved conversation with Jesus as she strives to trust Jesus in spite of her grief. Mary, however, also feeling the grief of her brother's death, has no questions for Jesus. All she does is fall at Jesus' feet. She has a very deep sense of devotion and surrender toward Jesus. Then John writes that Jesus called Lazarus forth from the tomb and raised him from the dead, which only engenders a deeper devotion in the lives of these two women toward Jesus. We see that in the very next chapter, John 12:1-3.

1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. 3 Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Martha, again, is busy serving dinner, and Mary, again, doesn't seem to be helping her sister in this situation. She seems intent on worshipping Jesus in an extravagant manner. The only difference between this gathering here in the Gospel of John and the gathering in Luke 10 is that, in the John story, the industrious Martha is not shown to be critical of her sister Mary. Later in John 12, Jesus specifically recognizes Mary for her devotion. There's something about Mary's devotion to Jesus that is even more honorable and noteworthy than even the gracious hospitality shown by Martha.

As we consider what our devotion to God should be in light of Mary's devotion, let's consider what our devotion is not.

1. Our devotion to God is never a matter of competition between you and other people. Our devotion to God is never a matter of one person competing to try to show themselves better or more devoted to God than another person. Here in Luke 10, Mary is not competing with Martha and Jesus is not commending Mary as having won some kind of a devotion contest. In the first century, the Jewish Pharisees were very spiritually disciplined. (They were also Jesus' most vocal opponents). Jesus sharply criticized them for their false confidence in their own spiritual disciplines because they were putting their confidence in *their* disciplines as an indication of their devotion to God.

2. The Bible does not give us a concrete, step-by-step plan for how to express one's devotion to God. I remember teaching a Sunday School class for recent college graduates and eliciting some surprise when I said "the Bible doesn't command us to have a 'Quiet time'". No one could have told me where such a commandment might be found in the Scriptures, but such a discipline was so ingrained in the minds of some that there was an assumption that such an imperative surely must be in the Bible.

Developing a prayer life and learning the Scriptures (both together as a church community and in your own home) are necessary elements for our spiritual growth. But the degree to which we carry out such disciplines is not a good barometer to measure our devotion to God. In my own life, there have been some seasons when I have been very disciplined and consistent in prayer and devotional practices, and at the same time, I have found myself to be the most irritable, impatient and temperamental with others. Likewise, in times when a demanding schedule kept me from my typical devotional practice, I have found myself (empowered by the Holy Spirit, I believe) to effortlessly show a surprising amount of patience, love and faith.

3. God's devotion to you is not dependent upon your devotion to Him. We'll never find the word 'quiet time' in the Bible, but we will find this theme throughout the Scriptures, in every book. If we grade devotion on just working harder at our devotion to God, then Martha would win hands down. Mary's devotion that suggests to us that working harder isn't the key. So, what are the crucial elements of our devotion?

A) Recognizing ourselves as sinners who are recipients of God's mercy shown to us through Christ's death on the cross. That is the only reason we might be in a relationship with God. That's the only way we could have access to God.

B) Offering our lives as living sacrifices to God – because God has sacrificed everything for you. There are going to be many times when we disappoint God. If we were in a competition (with others) to show how devoted we are to God, then we might as well stop right now – because our failures quickly become apparent.

C) Remember the difference between Martha and Mary - our devotion to God is not based on what we do for Jesus but on how we respond to Him and who He is. Martha wanted to DO something for Jesus. Mary wanted to KNOW Jesus. Mary's later anointing of Jesus' feet was an out flowing of her devotion to Jesus - a response of love based on how much Mary realized that she was loved by God. We don't come to understand God's love for us by effort and doing. We come to understand God's love by walking with Him, but humbling ourselves and reflecting upon how He has shown His love for us. We come to be devoted to God by learning how devoted He is to you. Our devotion to Him is an expression of our dependence upon Him. So many of Jesus' metaphorical pictures of Himself are designed to show us our dependence on Him:

John 4:10 "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 6:35 "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

John 11:25-26 "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, **26** and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

That's where devotional practices and spiritual disciplines have their place – because we feel our need of Him and grow to depend upon the Lord.