

Coventry and Nuneaton Methodist Circuit

Worship sheet for Sunday 17th July 2022

Rev'd Keith Salter

What's your priority?

StF 530 To be in your presence

Prayer:

Our Father, here we are again, followers of Jesus sitting at his feet, like Mary, wanting and waiting to learn what you have to teach us. At another time we will serve like Martha, but for now the best we can do is rest in Jesus' presence, soaking up his nature, watching him, seeing how he moves, how he talks, how he shows his care. Learning by just being here at his feet, being. It is not a comfortable place to be, for in his presence we become aware of how different we are from Him. Father forgive us for our impatience, our prejudice, our lack of compassion for those around us. It is a very comfortable place to be, here in his presence. Here we feel acceptance, we know forgiveness, we are not judged. We are encouraged to grow, taught what matters, empowered to care and to do what he does. To be a little bit more like him. Just now, we can do no better than to stay here, honouring him in worship, loving him with praise, humbled at his feet. He will empower us with his word, inspire us with his message, fill us with his love. Then, we will go from here, to serve. Amen

Read: Luke 10:38-42

An old hymn to think, pray and contemplate.

As Jesus sought his wandering sheep,
With weary toil oppressed,
He came to Martha's lowly roof,
A loved and honoured guest.

While Martha serves with busy feet,
In reverential mood,
Meek Mary sits beside the Lord,
And feeds on heavenly food.

And Martha soon herself draws nigh,
The voice of love to hear;
Leaving her care for many things,
To feast on holier cheer

O thou, who canst for every soul
What most it needs provide,
Draw us to thee, that we may share
The part thou shall abide!

A few thoughts.

Have you heard about the man who asked his wife what she wanted for her birthday? The response to that: "I'd like to be eight again." Early on her birthday she was taken to a theme park where she was put on all the rides. After several hours she left the park feeling giddy and sick. Nevertheless, she was taken on to MacDonalds for a burger and milk shake, following which she was taken by her attentive husband to see a James Bond film with a large box of popcorn. After an eventful day they arrived home and our hero asked his wife whether she had enjoyed being eight again to which she replied, "You idiot – I meant my dress size."

I guess we can all get it wrong at times and often to our own chagrin. I suspect that something like that was happening in our reading today about Mary and Martha. It's a fascinating story and when we stop to think about it Martha wasn't doing anything wrong. She was doing what we would all do; she had guests and quite naturally she went into her kitchen to prepare a meal. This was the usual and expected thing to do. It was Mary who didn't offer to help that upset Martha. But Mary realised what Martha didn't: that is that listening to Jesus was important because he spoke the words of life.

Martha was "distracted by all the preparations that had to be made" but I don't think that Jesus really cared about the cleanliness of the house or what was for dinner; he cared about those who were sat around him feasting on his words. For this reason, Jesus commented: "Mary has chosen what is better." There are times when we get too busy and distracted in our Christian service and don't seek time to spend with God in prayer, Bible study or fellowship. There's always other things to do. Sometimes, we too, get too busy and distracted in our service to God. We don't take time for that simple companionship; we don't take time to consider our priorities.

Spending time with Jesus also helps us set priorities for life. It's all well and good giving ourselves time for prayer and Bible study and that's important for all Christians but it must lead somewhere. It's easy to think that more time with Jesus will lead to a stronger spirituality yet being faithful disciples involves being active and practical.

I was reading a few days ago about the number of children who have been orphaned in Ukraine; it broke my heart to discover how the Russian invasion had broken families apart and made so many widowed or

orphaned, homeless and neglected. Yes, we can pray (and so we should) but I rejoice when I hear of so many practical initiatives being realised and the Christian conviction that has led many to offer practical service for those who need it most. Even though we may not feel we can do much there are things we can do to offer love, support, and practical help to those in our own community who are in need.

Martha had set priorities in her life. But when she listened to Jesus those priorities changed. God has a great plan for us and needs us to listen to him. Do that and we realize that it isn't about attending to Jesus, as Martha did, it was serving Jesus, as Mary did. And in that service, they discover the true meaning of life and were able to set priorities. I'm sure that Jesus didn't mind Martha being the good hostess. But at that moment in his ministry, that wasn't what was important. He would have settled for a very simple snack. What he wanted was her company in fellowship with him. At that point in time that was the most important thing.

There's an old story about an executive with a telegraph company who went on a trip. On a very cold day he arrived at the bus station and found the telegraph station hoping to get warmed up. He found that it was equally cold. He asked the young telegraph operator why he hadn't built the fire and warmed the room up for cold travellers. The response: "Listen mister, I'm too busy sending telegrams to build fires."

The man then told this boy that he was the vice-president of the company and that he wanted him to send a telegram to the home office. The message was, "Fire this man immediately." The young telegraph operator got the message. A moment later, he began building a fire. The executive asked, "Young man, have you sent that telegram yet?" The young telegraph operator said, "Listen mister, I'm too busy building fires to send telegrams."

The point is that somewhere in life we must set our priorities. We must decide what really matters and make certain that the important things are done. Let's seek the mind of God and allow him to set our priorities, then we will fulfil his purpose.

Prayer:

God of grace and peace, grant that we may have the heart of Martha, understanding our responsibility and our calling to peace making; willing to work hard to set things right. Grant that we may have the heart of Mary, understanding that the presence of Jesus in our midst is the most important thing to seek; make us

willing to seek first your kingdom. Grant that we may have patience with the mess we are in, understanding that transformation is a process, willing to take the first steps. Lord Jesus, we invite you among us now, that we may sit at your feet. May the worried and distracted and the spiritually hungry know that the Kingdom of God is at hand. May we know the treasure of the presence of Christ and the peace of the presence of God among us, God with us. And may we set our distractions aside, making space to hear your voice, and only then setting about our work, to be the hands and feet of Christ in a worried world. Amen

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Another old hymn, this one by John Newton and found in his *Olney Hymns* 1779

Martha her love and joy expressed
By care to entertain her guest;
While Mary sat to hear her Lord,
And could not bear to lose a word.

The principle in both the same,
Produced in each a different aim;
The one to feast the Lord was led,
The other waited to be fed.

But Mary chose the better part,
Her Saviour's words refreshed her heart;
While busy Martha angry grew,
And lost her time and temper too.

With warmth she to her sister spoke,
But brought upon herself rebuke;
One thing is needful, and but one,
Why do thy thoughts on many run?

How oft are we like Martha vexed,
Encumbered, hurried, and perplexed!
While trifles so engross our thought,
The one thing needful is forgot.

Lord teach us this one thing to choose,
Which they who gain can never lose;
Sufficient in itself alone,
And needful, were the world our own.

Let groveling hearts the world admire,
Thy love is all that I require!
Gladly I may the rest resign,
If the one needful thing be mine!