

“Remain listening” Luke 10:38-42

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." (Luke 10:38-42 ESV)

Last time we discussed the parable of a Good Samaritan. That parable helped us to understand what does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself. It's not easy, for there is no a fixed list of neighbors, but *we* have to become a neighbor to anyone who is a need, regardless of what it costs to us.

That parable also showed us where to take a strength to do it. When Jesus Christ becomes our Good Samaritan, when He serves us as His neighbors, when He gives us everything including even His own life, then His love changes our lives. He loves us first, not in words, but in deeds and His love then empowers us to serve people around us.

This week the Gospel text teaches us about our relations with God. Let's go through this text and see, **first**, what does it mean to be a Christian? **Second**, what is the place of our activities, our works in a Christian life? **Third**, What is this good portion which Mary had chosen, and why it is so important to choose it?

Let's first take a quick look at this event. From the narrative before we know that Jesus was traveling together with His disciples. When they arrived in this village they all were looking for a house to stay. Jesus is reported to stay in a house of woman whose name was Martha. We can conclude that she was quite wealthy a woman, having her own house large enough to welcome and to host guests.

We read that she also had a sister whose name was Mary. Even as Jesus was traveling together with His disciples, in this passage Luke focusses our attention only to these three persons.

It is like depicting this event in a movie and focusing camera on the main characters leaving all others outside. What Luke tries to show are two different ways these sisters related to Jesus.

Jesus is teaching about the Kingdom of God, and Mary is sitting at His feet and listening to His teaching. 'To sit at His feet' is an expression which indicates that there were teacher-disciple relations between Jesus and Mary. The same way apostle Paul spoke about himself as being educated at the feet of famous rabbi Gamaliel. (Acts 22:3)

“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.”

We can picture it quite vividly - as Martha was doing all the stuff in serving guests, she was quite upset that Mary is not helping her. We could easily relate to that. Martha was doing everything and her little sister Mary was just sitting among Jesus disciples and listening to His teaching.

But it is not exactly what Luke describes. Martha was not overwhelmed by work. She was *distracted* with a much serving. It was not the case that she couldn't cope and needed her sister's help. She was *distracted*.

Distracted from what? Distracted by what, we may ask. That's a good question. Who was this man sitting in her house and teaching about the Kingdom of God? Who was He? Just one of traveling Rabbis?

With Jesus arrival the Kingdom of God was at hand. God's reign had begun. He, the Lord of all Himself was present in her house, speaking His life giving words to those who were willing to receive them.

But Martha was distracted. Distracted by herself, by her own activities. Luke shows it wonderfully in his gospel. Even if Martha calls Jesus 'the Lord' with the next breath she acts as if she is in charge.

“Do you not care, that *my* sister has left *me* to serve *alone*. You, tell her to help *me*.” Sounds like ‘I'm telling you, tell her, to do what I think is important.’

Jesus answer is amazing. ‘Martha, Martha!’ In Jewish culture this repetition sounded like ‘Dear Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things.’ Even if Martha had crossed the boundaries of hospitality and politeness intervening with her demands when Jesus was teaching, Jesus still replies with love and compassion.

‘Dear Martha, don't you see that there is only one thing, which is the most important, which you truly need – to be with me and to listen to my words. Your sister, she has chosen the good portion, it will not be taken away.’

Let's try to get to the heart of what Jesus is teaching us and to find the answer to these three question we asked in the beginning. **First**, what does it mean to be a Christian? Or what makes you a Christian?

Recently in “Unmasking Christianity” Bible study we discussed one of the more widespread misunderstandings about what it means to be a Christian. For almost everyone outside the Church, and, unfortunately, for many inside the Church, it means - doing the right thing, i.e. living a moral life.

Then we can hear people saying that they are better Christians than those who attend the Divine Service or Bible studies. That they don't need the Church to be a

Christians. That they don't need someone to tell them what to do, that their consciences are good enough to guide their lives. What a fateful ignorance!

Just think, how do we define who we are, our identity? Most often by our relations. I'm a son of Gunārs and Māra, I'm Jana's husband, I'm Betija's, Dāvid's and Daniel's Dad, etc. These are my different identities. I'm a Christian, I'm a child of the living God. Our relationships define who we are.

Of course, we also often define ourselves by what we do. I'm a pastor. I'm a student, and so on. But when it comes to our core identities, what we do doesn't matter so much. Whatever way I behave it won't make me a son of Gunārs and Māra if I'm not their son.

Whatever I do won't make me husband of Jana if I'm not her husband. Whatever we do won't make us Christians, if God doesn't make us His Children. ... And in the same way, we do not remain in all these relationships primarily by what we do in our life, but by cultivating them.

Just think, how does one person cultivate relationships with other person? How do we experience relationships with others? When we are together with them. When we speak with them. Right? It could be spoken word or it can be written word, but it is still by word, by speaking, by communication.

How does God have relationships with us? Exactly in the same way, by speaking with us. This is how one of the New Testament authors describes it: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son [Jesus Christ] whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." (Heb. 1:1-2) Today God continues to speak with us through His written word in the Bible and also sending His disciples with His message to all peoples.

Remember, the Word of God is never alone. It always comes together with the Holy Spirit. When God speaks to us, by His Spirit He transforms us to be a new creation. Step by step He renews all our being. If only we remain listening to Him.

Mary was sitting at Jesus feet and listening His teaching. This is what made her a Christian. Being in relations with God. Listening to Him. Allowing God to shape and form her through His word and the Spirit. We are Christians as long as we remain in conversation and in the presence of true God.

Where do we listen to Him? First, of course, He comes to us in the Divine Service. We are here to listen to Him and to enjoy His presence in the Holy Communion. Then He comes to us wherever we read, study and discuss His words as they are written in the Bible.

That's where we are listening to our God. That's how we are made Christians. Not by works, but by God's Word and the Spirit.

Yes, but don't we need to do at least something? Thus we come to our **second question**. What is the place of our activities, our works in a Christian life?

There is the place for our works. Very important place. There are no Christians without good works. Listen what apostle Paul wrote to Ephesians: "We are created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:10) Did you hear? We are created for good works to walk in them.

So what was wrong with Martha? She was distracted with much serving. There was nothing wrong in a fact that Martha was serving those in her house. There is nothing wrong when people strive very hard to serve others.

What Jesus is emphasizing – you need to have right priorities. Right sequence. If you want to live as a new creation, as a Christian, first you need to be shaped and empowered by the Words of God and by the Holy Spirit. Relations come first, then our actions flow from them.

Family analogy can be helpful to understand it. What makes us children of our parents? Our obedience, our behavior, our good grades, or achievements? You know the answer. Of course, none of them. We are made children of our parents when we are conceived.

But there is other side. Would it mean that our parents are not interested in our obedience, in our behavior, in our good grades and achievements? Of course parents are interested in all of this. They want us to live a good lives.

But how do we know what our parents expect from us? It's easy. They teach us according to their best abilities what they believe is right and what is wrong.

How do we know what God the Father expects from us? Again, it is simple. He teaches us. By His word. We cannot live as children of God and please Him if we don't know what is His will, right?! What He teaches and expects from us.

Think for a minute about our lives? How do we spend the time given to us? Most of the time we spend in families, as children, as spouses, as parents. Then we spend a lot of time in work, and some time resting.

This is very important, if we want to live a God pleasing life, which at the same time gives us good conscience and joy, then we need to understand what are God's intentions for our life, what is the meaning of our lives, why do we have marriage, families, why do we need to work and to rest.

Our Father in heaven, He is God Creator. He designed all these things. If we want to understand how to use them properly for our benefit and for a benefit of others, we need to read, if you will, an instruction.

Of course, we can live our lives, we can be married, and have children, work, rest, and so on anyway, but if we don't know God's intention for all of them, we will misuse them in one way or another, harming others and ourselves. It is that simple.

This is exactly what we see today in the world. Broken marriages, destroyed families, wounded children, overwork and pressure to do and have more, and lack of joy and meaning in life even of those, who seemingly have everything. You know what I'm talking about. This is all around us. We are not immune either.

That's why our listening to God ought to come first. Only from Him we can learn what and how to do. And when we learn it, then we go and serve our neighbor as ourselves, living in joy and peace that come to us from our God.

It's important to add more. Even when we know God's will, we often struggle to live according to it. Then Christ is irreplaceable. He not just teaches His will, but by His Holy Spirit He helps us to live accordingly.

And even more, when we fail again, and again, and again... and you know that we do, He comes to us as our Good Samaritan, forgives us, heals our wounds, and restores us in relations with God the Father.

Thus we come to **our last question**. Jesus said that "Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." What is this good portion and why it is so important to choose it?

We already have partly answered to this question. Mary had chosen the right priorities. She did what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Mat 6:33)

Why is it so important? Because this portion *will not be taken away!* We need to keep in mind all the time, if you will, the big picture. We all know that things come and go. That's our common experience. There are good times and there are very bad times. Nothing here is permanent.

God is Creator, we are His creation. Everything we are, everything we have is just borrowed. Nothing in this life is permanent. Even our life we keep receiving with every breath and with every heartbeat. We don't possess it. And one day even it will be required from us. What remains? Where can we put our trust? Is there anything that won't change? Anything?!

Yes, there is. This is what Jesus is telling us. "I am the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:25-26) "For I, the Lord, do not change."

Mary had chosen this portion. And you, remain in the presence of Christ, listening to His words! We all are invited to do the same. For this God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1Tim. 2:4)

We are made the children of God in the Baptism. We remain the children of God when we remain at His feet listening what He is teaching. And what we gain, the Kingdom of God, will never be taken from us. That's God's promise.

Just remain listening. Amen.