

Compass Bearing #23

Devotions to Navigate the Coronavirus Pandemic

"The Mary-Martha Syndrome"

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Jesus was a friend with a man named Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. Lazarus was most likely the provider for the family, as their parents are never mentioned and were most likely dead in a culture in which people did not live very long. So, the three of these siblings took care of each other, with Lazarus being the income provider.

The two sisters couldn't have been more different. Martha was known for "doing" for people, while her sister Mary was known for "being" with people. Look at the distinction between the two in Luke 10.

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Both sisters wanted to honor Jesus. Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened. Martha got on her own feet and served.

One day their brother Lazarus died. When Jesus showed up a few days after the burial, the sisters were upset. Martha, known for "doing," was no doubt gripped by worry. She must have asked things like, "Who is going to provide for us? Will we have to sell the house? Will my sister and I have to resort to begging?" Mary, known for "being," was no doubt overcome by grief. She must have made statements like, "I loved my brother so much. He is gone forever. My sadness is so heavy, I can hardly bear it."

Then Jesus did the miraculous. He called Lazarus out of the grave! Can you imagine the relief and joy these sisters felt? All of Martha's worries and Mary's griefs were vanquished in a moment's time. So did the experience of their brother being raised from the dead change their basic approach to life? Well, take a look at an episode not much later.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (John 12:1-3)

Martha is still "doing" and Mary is still "being." Martha showed her gratitude by cooking and serving a delicious dinner. Mary showed her thankfulness by anointing Jesus' feet with an expensive, fragrant perfume. The aromas of Martha's cooking and Mary's perfume probably swirled together in the room to make an unforgettable scent. Rather than thinking that one of these sisters was right and the other wrong, perhaps we should consider both of them contributing to the banquet in a way that was unique to their God-given personalities.

Think of someone who does things differently than you do. Take a moment to give thanks for those differences. Pray for that person. God has created them to be exactly who they are. Next time you see them, tell them how grateful you are for the unique ways they contribute to your life and the world!