

Reflection: Mary Grant – August 17, 2025

A New Look at Martha and Mary

I don't think I can find a much shorter text on which to reflect. Five relatively short verses. Luke 10, verses 38 to 42. Preparing my reflection should have been straight forward, but no; I went right down the rabbit hole, following one commentary to another, jumping from commentaries on scripture to articles on auto-immune diseases, like Lupus. Now, articles on lupus tend to draw me in anyway, as I have had lupus for most of my life and I handle it pretty well. Staying out of the sun, wearing a hat, and using sunscreen have just been part of my life. I grew up knowing that if I went in the sun, the cement that held my cells together would break down. But I digress, so let me get back to the story of Mary and Martha.

The Coles version of the story is that Jesus has been on the road preaching and has quite a following. He approaches Bethany and Martha, the sister of his friend Lazarus, invites him into her home to rest and have a meal. Her sister Mary has been in the group that has come from Magdala in Galilee, and she joins the others, sitting at Jesus feet and continuing to listen to him. She, in fact, is so attentive to what Jesus is saying, she doesn't notice that Martha is getting upset.

Martha is a planner, she likes to entertain, but she likes notice. An RSVP would help too, so she could plan a meal and have all the ingredients ready. She likes to have

company, but she is finding that she is so busy getting a meal ready for Jesus and his followers, that she is not enjoying the company. She is flitting here and there, counting the portions of meat and cheese and bread, figuring out what she can add to stretch her resources. Entertaining this way is distracting and not pleasant. She could use some help. Mary could run to the neighbour and ask for the proverbial “cup of sugar”, but, no, there she is just sitting there. Surely Mary can certainly see how busy Martha is. She can see how many people have arrived and how many expect to be fed. Martha wishes she could just sit and listen, but then there would be no food prepared. She becomes so distracted that she is inefficient, and less and less gets accomplished. She needs to stop, take a deep breath, and keep the preparation simple. However, she just keeps on with resentment building towards those who are listening to Jesus until it overflows. She heads towards Jesus and quite firmly if not peeved, asks him to tell Mary to join her in preparing the meal. But Jesus doesn’t tell Mary to join Martha. Instead, he points out that Martha is getting distracted and trying to do too much. The more she tries to do, the less gets done. Mary has her goal in mind and is following through on it without letting anything get in the way.

When I first learned this story in Sunday School, I thought about my mother, who was always busy doing. I thought about how she often interrupted me when I was reading to come and help her. Discussing this story with her did not

change her mind. She still interrupted my reading to have me help with the meal preparations or housecleaning. I think my interpretation was a little self-centered and a lot off the mark.

James Laurence refers to the Greek word for “distracted” which is used in the bible. *Perispaoumai* means to be pulled away or pulled apart. Isn’t that a perfect description of what happens when we are distracted? We head here, then there, seemingly spinning outwardly as well as in our heads. Unless we stop and let the world slow down, we accomplish very little if anything and we have drained ourselves of all our energy. We are literally pulled apart, and unless or until we get ourselves back on track and back together, we will be no good for others or for ourselves.

There is a Latin-based word which means almost the opposite. The word re-legare, from which we get the word “religion”, means re-attached. Just think on that for a minute. Religion is actually re-attaching ourselves to what truly matters, to Christ. With religion we hold everything together.

There is an intriguing thing about the human body. In case you were wondering, this is where I tie in the comments on Lupus. Our cells are held together by a molecule called laminin. If we did not have this protein within our bodies, our cells would fall apart. If the cells fall apart, our organs cease to function. With the invention of the electronic microscope,

scientists were able to see what Laminin looked like. I have brought with me a sketch of what the basic laminin molecule looks like. (Project Sketch which is made of two strands which coil around a central strand and form a cross).

Yes, this molecule and the many variations of it, are made of three proteins. Taken together, they take on the form of the cross. I can't explain it. I can't imagine what those scientists thought when they first saw the molecule. It is just one of those mysteries in life.

In the United Church, we have a call for **Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice**. Our call has both Mary and Martha components to it. There is the Mary focus in the deep spirituality. We come and worship, we read and think about the scriptures, we pray and we raise our voices in praise. In bold discipleship, we follow the Martha focus. We act, and in order to avoid being pulled apart, we act daringly to bring justice to our lives and to the world in which we live. Jesus was not chastising Martha for preparing the meal. He just wanted her to keep it simple and not get distracted. It would be the same as me trying to have everyone sit at the dining room table and using the good dishes, versus putting some food on the counter and saying, come and help yourselves. To be truly effective Christians, we must balance both the Martha and the Mary within us.

In Colossians Chapter 1 verses 15 to 28, Paul describes Christ as holding everything together. Verse 17 reads: He is

before all things, and in him all things hold together. Christ is the Laminin of Christianity.

Paul goes on to describe how Christ is the head and focus of the church. The Colossians, having turned to Christianity have given up some of the worst parts of their lifestyle. Paul emphasizes that they need to listen to the Gospel and follow the teachings of Christianity. Both the learning and putting Christianity into action are essential.

That was thousands of years ago. The world has changed in many ways, but it remains the same in critical ways. When we get right down to the core, we all have to balance both the Mary and the Martha which resides in each of us. Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship and Daring Justice will bring its own reward. Amen