

A Disturbing Story

Jesus ...came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 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!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one, Mary has chosen what is better, needed, necessary, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42

I call this a disturbing story because it's a story that at times has been interpreted in a matter that causes controversy in the Church and I don't believe that was the intent of Jesus. I believe that Jesus wants harmony in the Church.

Mary and Martha both loved Jesus and Jesus loved them. On this occasion they were both serving Jesus, Martha by providing His physical needs and Mary by listening to Jesus' teaching. Martha came to Jesus complaining that she was doing all the work. Jesus did not tell Martha her way was wrong. I think that Jesus appreciated Martha for providing His physical needs.

To properly interpret this story we have to get beyond the thought that it's just a story about two sisters hosting Jesus in different ways and that one is right and the other wrong. I believe it's more of a story about who Jesus is and what He is trying to teach.

The NIV translation uses the word better referring to Mary's way but most translation use the word need or needed and one necessary. I think the word needed best describes what Jesus is teaching in this story. As Christians we are both spiritual and physical beings and you cannot separate the two. However, the spiritual is eternal and the physical temporary to this world.

In this situation Mary represents the spiritual and Martha the physical but in hosting Jesus both are needed. When we apply this story to the Church Mary represents the spiritual and Martha represents the physical. As a Church we have both spiritual needs and physical needs and both must be provided for.

The statement that the Church is not a building but people has often been said. If that is true, and I believe it is, the people need a meeting place and therefore need a building and the building needs to be maintained. As a Church we need to worship at Jesus feet and then get up from our knees and go to work and it all needs to be done in harmony.

I see a Church where people preach and teach and share their faith. I see a Church where people plan their ministry, tend to their finances and maintain their building. I see a Church where people fellowship and break bread together. I see a Church where people have a variety of gifts and talents to provide for both the spiritual needs and the physical needs of the Church and do it in harmony. I see a Church where all these people come together and worship at Jesus feet. I see this Church as the Church I belong to.

"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy!" Philip. 1:4