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# I Don't Have Time For That

SCRIPTURE:  
Luke 10:38-42

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May 2, 2021 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are

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**W**e are talking about friendship and doing so in some pretty basic ways, I'll admit. The only wisdom I have to offer this week is to say that friendships, if they are going to matter to us, will take time. The care you feel in your heart will need to be reflected on your calendar. And time is a precious commodity because there are so many good things that require our time. It seems we never have enough time to pay attention to everything that demands it.

I have invited us to sit with Martha and Mary—a challenging story, no doubt. It's challenging because so many of us identify with the wrong person in the story. In any bible study I have ever led on this text, Martha gets more than a few defenders. Martha invites Jesus to her home, which is a display of hospitality, and a very important practice in Christian faith. Then she busies herself in preparations for a meal. It is true that one does not live by bread alone, but one does not live long without it.

In those days, you wouldn't have someone to your home and not feed them. It's expected. And she does this all by herself. Her sister Mary is no help, choosing to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to him while Martha is warming the oven, chopping the veggies, tenderizing the meat and kneading the bread. Not only does she get zero help from Mary, but when Martha complains about it, Jesus tells her she should be more like her sister. Why are you distracted with all of your tasks? Why are you doing so much?

This is an odd thing for Jesus to say—particularly given the last conversation he had. Just before Martha invites Jesus in for dinner, Jesus told a lawyer the

parable of the Good Samaritan.

The lawyer had questions... what must I do? Who is my neighbor? But he also had answers. He had all the right answers. He knows everything he needs to know, but his problem is that he doesn't do anything. He doesn't put his faith into action because twice Jesus has to tell him: If you do this, you will live. Go and do likewise. This lawyer is a thinker, but he's not a doer. And that's his problem. Faith is not just thought; it is lived.

But poor Martha is a doer, and that's what gets her into trouble. Jesus says: Why can't you be more like your sister who just sits and listens to the word?

So, what does Jesus want? Does he want us to do or to stop being distracted by our doing and just sit and think on the word? Jesus is being impossible.

In Ann Tyler's novel, *Back When We Were Grownups*, Rebecca is a widowed woman who lives in her husband's childhood home with her father-in-law. The first floor is an event space where she hosts graduation parties, retirement gatherings, and wedding receptions.

She's in her mid-fifties, mothering the children and grandchildren that resulted from her deceased husband's first marriage. And she has this sense that she, as she says, somewhere along the way, "turned into the wrong person."<sup>1</sup> In a phone conversation with her brother-in-law, Zeb, she says, "Look at me. I'm a professional party giver! I never read anymore, or discuss important issues, or go to cultural events. I don't even have any friends."

"You've got friends," Zeb said. "You've got me; you've got the girls—"

"Those are relatives. And everyone else I know is

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1 Ann Tyler, *Back When We Were Grownups*, (2001), p. 3.

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some kind of repairman.”<sup>2</sup> Rebecca has been busy with her life, but finds herself friendless.

I wonder if Martha felt that way? Did she look around and realize she was so busy with her life that she was alone? Here she is doing the best she can and Jesus says she’s missed it. So, is she not supposed to provide dinner?

No, that’s not it. The reality is she is doing a good thing, a very good thing. Actually, Jesus describes the tasks that she is doing as her *diakonios*. It’s the Greek word for ministry. It’s the word from which we get deacon; she is distracted by her ministry. That’s a bad thing?

We are going to miss the point if we try to make one of these activities good and one bad. The point of the story is that both are good. So, why is Martha called out? Not for what she’s doing, but for being distracted. Sometimes good things in our lives can distract us from relationships, from friendships. That’s what Jesus says to Martha: Martha, you are distracted. Not from what—from whom?

She is so consumed by the presentation of the table, she may not really know, I mean *really know* those with whom she eats. It’s better to share a PB&J with a friend, than to dine on bacon-wrapped scallops in orange sauce with strangers.

Here’s the point. You work hard to do good with your time. If, like me, you are in the working years, sometimes that work can seem so important that nothing else matters. It’s not that work is bad, it’s that it can distract us from others... from friendship.

I have a friend named Spencer. He is not part of this church family. I have known him a long time. Spencer has a son named Trey. Spencer spent hours and hours volunteering as a coach of every team Trey played on. Spencer was not an athlete himself, so he had to study baseball and soccer and basketball. It wasn’t so bad when Trey was little; most anyone could coach the little ones. But the games

get complicated quickly. Spencer worked hard, late nights, special camps, and he became a very good coach, actually. They shared that journey for years.

But one day, Trey told his dad, “I’m not playing baseball this year. I just don’t want to.” Spencer said, “I don’t understand. You are at the top of your game; this will be your year. All this time we put into the game and you are just walking away?”

“But, Dad, I don’t like baseball.” Spencer said, he looked at his son, and realized that somewhere along the way, he had forgotten why he started all of this. He volunteered at first, knowing nothing about coaching; he was just a dad being there for his son. But somewhere along the way, he got distracted. He said, “Tom, I don’t know when it happened, but at some point I traded being a dad for being a coach. It was a bad trade.”

I have a pastor friend... again, not at this church, who told me that he started a small group. He and his wife invited some folks over to their home to share a little wine, study the bible together, and talk about their lives. He told them, “I would like us to do this on a regular basis. Would you mind coming over again?” One of the folks said, “But you are so busy. I can’t imagine you would have time.” My pastor friend said, “You know, I’m doing this because I’m lonely. I am so busy, I haven’t made time for friends.”

Do you know what he’s talking about? Martha, don’t let dinner distract you. Your life is always about people.

It’s pretty simple this week. Try this. Pull out your calendar and look it over. Of all the necessary things, of all the good things that you are doing, when do you find time for friendship?

Because when the meal is all prepared, you don’t want to come to the realization that you know more about the ingredients of the chicken marsala than you do the burdens and joys of your friends.

2 Ann Tyler, *Back When We Were Grownups* (2001) p. 53.