

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.
Amen.

So we have some very interesting readings here in Genesis and then in the gospel. Let's first off, start off with Genesis. We got Abraham sitting in his place and three men come. Now these three men, is it the Lord and two angels, or is it the Father, Son and Holy Spirit appearing in three persons? It's never really clarified. We do you know that one of them speaks and he is Yahweh. Now, it's interesting when Abraham greets him, he says, "Oh Lord, if I found favor in your sight." He just uses the honorific Lord. He does not use the name Yahweh. There's a difference there between the all caps LORD, which is in Hebrew, the Yahweh versus this one, which is just Lord I.E. somebody who is superior in nature to me. Whether he understood who this was that was showing up or not, that's unclear. He definitely knows by the end that it is the Lord.

But here he is doing what a good person does in showing hospitality to one another. He is serving his guest, the sojourner in the land who just happens to be God Himself. And so he says, "Just wash your feet and I'll give you some water and a little bit of bread." Well, then he tells his wife three [inaudible 00:01:30] of flour, and then he goes and finds a young calf in the herd, which is not a simple thing. He has to run to find him, brings them to a young man, the young man prepares the animal quickly. How quickly can you prepare a live animal into a meal for the day? That's not exactly a quick process. It's going to take some time.

And so this is an all-day affair in essence, as he is asking these people to sit and rest for a brief moment while he prepares a feast for you to come from the raw ingredients that they started off with. And then of course, he brings some milk and some curd and serves God this meal and that is a lot of work that was just done, and then you compare that to the gospel. Martha's also doing a lot of work to serve Jesus and the people that are with him. And yet when she comes to Jesus and says, "Can't you tell my sister to help? Don't you care?" Jesus rebukes her and says, "Mary has chosen the better path." So what is Jesus saying here? It's not right to do the service? No, that's not definitely not what he's saying. Abraham was definitely doing the right thing by serving God.

In fact, when God speaks to him, He says, "Sarah is going to have a child with the son of Abraham." The son of Abraham is the person that we read about then in the gospel lesson. The initial promise of the son to Sarah and Abraham is now fully completed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And so we kind of see this come full circle. The son that was promised is now speaking to Mary and Martha. Okay, so we get to Mary and Martha, and Mary and Martha, Mary is sitting at the feet listening to Jesus while Martha is busy serving, but what's the issue? You notice it says, "But

Martha was distracted with much serving," and then later on when Jesus greets her, He says, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things." See herein lies the issue.

So often we beat up Martha and we say, "Well, Mary's got the right idea and we all want to be like Mary," but Martha was not wrong in serving Jesus. That's not the issue here. We are called to serve one another. I mean, last week we read, "Love the Lord, your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul and all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself." So we are called to serve one another, so it's not the service and it's not the work that Martha is doing that is being condemned here. Because that often confuses a lot of people. It's like, what are we just supposed to spend our entire days just sitting around listening to Jesus and not doing anything? How are we going to eat? How are we going to keep the house clean? How's any work going to be done? It's not saying that.

The key is Martha was distracted by much serving. Have you ever been at a point where you're doing something and you're complaining about it while you're doing it? That's what we're talking about here. You clean the house because you got guests coming. You want to create a nice environment for them, and all the time you're going, "I'm cannot believe they're coming to this house. I've got clean everything up." Nobody's ever done that before. Or you wake up on Sunday morning and go, "Oh man, it's Sunday. I got to go to church. Fine, I'll go."

It is not about what you're doing, it's the attitude behind. You're distracted by much service. Even doing "good things," I mean, how many times are we distracted in our own lives and we get focused upon our own self and we get anxious and upset? We're doing our jobs and we're not sure whether the money's going to come into pay for everything that we need to support this body and life and we get anxious. We get distracted by the work and forget to trust God. We get anxious about our health and forget to trust that God has promised to take care of us and to provide for us. We get anxious when a loved one is facing death and we forget that God has promised to care for even in death. We get distracted by the cares and the worries and the day-to-day life of life and we take our eyes off of Jesus. The word obedience in Greek has the word to hear right in the word. See, in order to obey, you need to hear what it is that you're supposed to do.

But in the case of God, you need to hear what God has done for you already. If you look at the Book of Colossians, the reading that we read today, we talk about us being alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds, but God Himself has reconciled us through His flesh in His death so that we may be presented holy and blameless, that we might be presented holy and blameless. In other words, as far as God concerned, we are sanctified, we are justified not because we have done

anything, but because He has presented us as holy and blameless because of what He has done in His own flesh for us, that is dying on the cross.

See, doing good works is pointless if we haven't heard what God wants for us and what He has done for us. If we don't understand the word, if we haven't heard the word, we can't obey properly. We might be looking busy, but because our hearts are in the wrong place, it's not a good work unto the Lord. It's trying to justify ourselves or trying to make us look good before others or trying to make us feel good because we did something bad before and we're trying to make up for it by trying to do something good. All of those things we end up doing often in our lives. But what God is talking about here in all of these verses is that the motivation ... Mary has chosen the better portion. Not because she's just sitting around and not doing anything, but because she's focused upon hearing first.

I mean, think about it. If Mary and Martha had sat down and listened, and then at the end of it, they both got up and then they both served out of the joy of what they had heard and the joy of serving their master, we would've never heard about this. But it was because she was distracted by much serving, even trying to do good things. If your focus is upon the doing and not upon the hearing, which causes you then, inspires you to do, you're missing the point. We need to be fed first by the word, the word that became flesh and dwelt among us. The word that was promised to Abraham and Sarah, and the son, that son, not Isaac per se, but the son of Abraham who would take away the sins.

That's what we need to be focused on, that's what we need to hear. Because in hearing that word, we are presented holy and blameless before God, and if we are holy and blameless, then what is there to be anxious and troubled about? In Christ, we don't need to be anxious. In Christ, we don't need to be troubled. Yet, does that mean nothing bad is going to happen to us? Absolutely not. We're still going to suffer. We're still going to go through hard times. We're still going to have difficulties in our health and our well-being and our relationships. All of that is true. But what do we do with that anxiety?

Do we bottle it up? Do we hold it in? Do we just try harder to get it right or do we give it to God? In our intro it says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. You can start walking in the darkness, but you never know what's going to happen unless you have a light." You can be very busy walking around, tripping and stumbling, but you're not getting anywhere, you're not in the right path unless you are guided by light and that light in our path, in our life is His Word. So we receive the word, we are strengthened by the word, we are nourished by the word, and then as a result of that nourishment, we then go and serve, not distracted by much serving, but serving out of the joy of our salvation.

Notice what Paul says at the end of Colossians, the last verse, he says, "For this, I toil for their salvation," for the proclamation of gospel, for the preaching, for the suffering that he faces, for being the steward of the mysteries of God. "For this, I toil struggling with all His strength." Notice what Paul says there. He's not struggling with his own strength. He's struggling with His strength, with His energy, with the energy and the strength of God.

In other words, everything that we do, all the good works that we are called and God has given us good works to do. He's given them beforehand that we might do them and give glory to Him. We don't have to struggle in our own mind to figure it out. We struggle in His strength and His energy so that He powerfully works within us. He is the one that is working through our good works because He is the one who has saved us. He is the one that has nourished us. He is the one that has given us all good things, His grace and mercy. He is the one that had presented us holy and blameless, not by our own efforts, not by what we do, but by what He has done for us.

And so as a result, we go and serve our neighbor. And how do we know how to serve and what the good works are that God has given for us to do? Good place to start is the table of duties in the small catechism where it describes our vocation, our calling by God. The first one is what you should expect of me as a pastor and the congregation is called to serve me and connect with and how we work together. That is a good work that we do for each other. And then it goes on to fathers and mothers and children and employers and employees and citizens and old and young and all these different things. Those are the good works. Live our life in those areas to the glory of God, and that's a good place to start. And then how as a citizen, how as a member of this congregation, can we serve? How as a member of this community can we love our neighbor as ourselves?

But it's all because as with Mary, one thing is necessary: the Word of God planted in our hearts. The gift given, not by our own effort, not by our own strength, not by our own wisdom, without any merit or worthiness within me, but simply by His grace and His love, He presents us holy and blameless. If we are holy and blameless before God, if we are promised everlasting life, if we are promised to live with Him for all eternity, if we are promised that He will wipe every tear from our eyes. If all of that is true and it is, then what is there to be anxious about? What is there to be troubled about?

Cast your burdens upon Him and He will care for you. Let Him take care of you as He has promised to do. Trust Him that His Word does what He says it's going to do. If He has presented you holy and blameless, then you are holy and blameless before God. If He promises you peace, that peace is yours. If He tells you that His Word is a lamp to your feet and a light to your path, it is. He will guide. He will

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direct because He has saved and He has loved you. May that grace and that mercy and that peace be and abide with you always and sustain you in all good things unto life everlasting. Amen.