

**Patricia Friesen, May 8, 2016**  
**MFM Mother's Day Meditation**

This is Mother's Day. I prefer to think of it as 'Mothering Day' or 'Nurturing Day'; a day when all of us focus on how we care for those around us. But in the context of 'Mothering Day', I am bringing you a few reflections on the Martha & Mary passage, which touches some issues that women & mothers often face.

- So we see Martha welcoming Jesus and possibly 12 disciples to her home, including Mary & brother Lazarus, this meant supper for 16 people!
  - Martha seems to be the head of the house
  - from her comments to Mary, it seems she was the older sister
  - but also, because she is a woman, was responsible for organizing or preparing a meal and quite likely making sleeping arrangements for the guests
  - she may or may not have had help in the kitchen – it sounds from her question that she was working alone
  
- it wasn't unreasonable to prepare a meal for guests – there was no depanneur!
  - there would have been street vendors selling food
  - but eating at someone's home was so much more comfortable than eating on the street from a street vendor
  
- I am trying to understand why Jesus rebuked Martha, because it seems she was doing something very reasonable
  - Martha was preparing a big meal for a popular rabbi and his disciples
    - this was an honor – and also, an honorable thing for this household to do
  - “Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.”
  - what could Martha have done differently?
    - Martha could have recognized that it was important for Mary to listen to Jesus' teaching – and not be interrupted
      - God sent the Son to earth to live with us & teach us, he's sitting in your living room and you drag your sister into the kitchen to chop vegetables!?
    - Jesus was calling M. To slow down & spend time with him
      - I think for any host or hostess, this would have been difficult, until the guests are fed
    - maybe Martha was also worried about other things besides food
      - ie. Why was her brother Lazarus not mentioned? Was he ill? Was he away travelling on business?
      - maybe she had other work/business that was set aside when Jesus came to visit
      - maybe Martha was worried about the implications of Jesus' teaching
        - the previous Luke passage reports Jesus' conversation about the most important commandments – maybe Martha was perplexed about how she could follow Christ with her whole heart
    - unless Martha completely scaled down her menu
      - she could have served humus & pita & cold water!
      - she could have delegated some work earlier
        - she tried too late to delegate to Mary
        - she might have given money to one of the disciples to go out to the street vendors and buy food

- what was Jesus trying to teach Martha?
  - she was Martha Stewart, serving a big meal, worrying over details
    - Martha Stewart is like the Virtuous Woman in Proverbs 31 – over the top!!
    - clearly hosting guests, preparing a menu, setting the table, cooking, baking, is an art form
    - and for many women, even conservative Mennonite woman, it is one area where art can flourish
    - but the high standard, supported in the media, can keep us from getting together to share a meal
    - when women (mostly women!) label each other as Martha Stewart, it is to express admiration & recognition of beauty/art/skill/creativity
    - but often this results in negative comparison with ourselves, self-criticism
  - incidently – Martha was apparently trying to pull rank as the older sister
    - it would have been more polite to speak with Mary privately
  - as I said earlier, Jesus was also teaching Martha to slow down and spend time with him, make space for her spiritual growth, to nurture herself spiritually – 'Man does not live by bread alone!' (Matt.4:4)
    - Jesus by example fled the crowds and spent time alone with God in prayer
    - this is a difficult challenge in any society, in any era
    - in my personal fight for quiet time, I have taken to writing in a journal
      - this way I can see when my concentration is wandering
      - and I try to remember to leave my cell phone in another room
- the surrounding passages could add much to the Martha story – I will only mention them
  - The Good Samaritan story where Jesus confronts our comfortable habits of hospitality and pushes us towards radical hospitality – who is my neighbor?
  - the Lord's prayer passage follows – give us this day our daily bread
    - someone makes that bread with their hands, in a bakery or at home
    - bread doesn't fall from heaven
    - but it is a reminder to acknowledge the gifts that come from God – gifts that must be shared and not hoarded

Where do we go from here? What can we learn from Martha & Mary & Jesus?

1) keep the food simple – scale down the meal

- scale down the expectations
- invite people for dessert & coffee
- serve humus & pita!!

2) open your home 'tel quel'

- I hear so often “I'll have to clean the house if I have guests.”
- I was visiting my cousin's family recently – they have sons 16 & 19 years old – my cousin's wife Ruth said “I always keep the house clean, so the boys can drop over any time with their friends.”
  - well that's not the situation at our house, and sometimes this does affect our freedom to invite people over

- again we can scale down our expectations – refuse the Martha Stewart model!
- another eg. our house was embroiled in a prolonged renovation, but we still at times had guests for supper, we just hung out in the kitchen
- I will never keep my house as neat/clean as my mother did

### 3) many of us could delegate more

- probably many families could learn more about delegating the house cleaning and food prep among family members
- one friend my age was raised in a family of 6 – the mother was a fabulous cook and the children, from the age of 6, took turns cooking with their mother, 1 week at a time
- we could do more potluck entertaining
- we were part of a cooking collective for a few years – actually several cooking collectives – and I guess we still are – at first, a few nights a week people would take turns hosting the whole group – then it evolved to dropping in to pick up food and bringing it home to eat
  - now for 4 years we have been swapping food prep with one other family – every 2-4 weeks we eat together, the host prepares the main dish and the guest family brings the salad
- if a friend is coming over for dinner and asks “Can I bring something?”
  - the answer is “Yes!” - let them bring a salad or dessert – make it easier for you as host

### 4) what are the priorities

- if the priority is getting together & if you really can't have guests over – whatever the reason may be
  - consider going out for coffee, or a picnic
- for my Book Club, I was once hosting the group & sent around a belated email saying - “My house is lightly cleaned – my family is not fed – but I've finished the book!” - the priority was the book
- remember too Jesus' teaching about priorities - “My dear Martha, you are so upset over all these details! There is really only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, sitting down, listening to my teaching. I won't take it away from her.”

Proverbs 31 The Message Version

**8** "Speak up for the people who have no voice, for the rights of all the down-and-outers.

**9** Speak out for justice! Stand up for the poor and destitute!"

**10** A good woman is hard to find, and worth far more than diamonds.

**11** Her husband trusts her without reserve, and never has reason to regret it.

**12** Never spiteful, she treats him generously all her life long.

**13** She shops around for the best yarns and cottons, and enjoys knitting and sewing.

**14** She's like a trading ship that sails to faraway places and brings back exotic surprises.

**15** She's up before dawn, preparing breakfast for her family and organizing her day.

**16** She looks over a field and buys it, then, with money she's put aside, plants a garden.

**17** First thing in the morning, she dresses for work, rolls up her sleeves, eager to get started.

**18** She senses the worth of her work, is in no hurry to call it quits for the day.

**19** She's skilled in the crafts of home and hearth, diligent in homemaking.

**20** She's quick to assist anyone in need, reaches out to help the poor.

**21** She doesn't worry about her family when it snows; their winter clothes are all mended and ready to wear.

**22** She makes her own clothing, and dresses in colorful linens and silks.

**23** Her husband is greatly respected when he deliberates with the city fathers.

**24** She designs gowns and sells them, brings the sweaters she knits to the dress shops.

**25** Her clothes are well-made and elegant, and she always faces tomorrow with a smile.

**26** When she speaks she has something worthwhile to say, and she always says it kindly.

**27** She keeps an eye on everyone in her household, and keeps them all busy and productive.

**28** Her children respect and bless her; her husband joins in with words of praise:

**29** "Many women have done wonderful things, but you've outclassed them all!"

**30** Charm can mislead and beauty soon fades. The woman to be admired and praised is the woman who lives in the Fear-of-God.

**31** Give her everything she deserves! Festoon her life with praises!

Readers' Theatre Luke 10:38-42 (NIV)

(Children stay in their seats.)

(To start, Martha stands by the pulpit. Mary stands with disciples.)

(Jesus and disciples stand facing MFM crowd, close to kitchen door; Jesus gestures to MFM, pantomimes teaching.)

Narrator: Jesus & his disciples were travelling through the small towns of Israel, they were walking and stopping frequently as Jesus was teaching the people about the kingdom of God, about God's work in this world. Jesus was teaching in the town of Bethany.

(Martha gives a note to Narrator, who gives note to Jesus; Jesus reads note & nods affirmatively to Narrator.)

Narrator: A woman named Martha sent an invitation, opening her home, asking if Jesus & disciples would come for supper.

(Jesus, disciples & Mary walk to Martha, knock on pulpit & Martha greets them.)

Martha: Please come in!! Here is water to wash your feet, if they are dusty. opened her home to him.

Narrator: Mary sat at the Jesus' feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations for the big dinner she was preparing.

(Jesus & disciples & Mary sit down on the floor and Jesus continues to pantomime teaching.)

(Mary pantomimes asking Jesus questions.)

(Martha pantomimes shuffling pots, chopping vegetables, stirring pot, wipes brow, looks stressed.)

Martha (barely controlling distress, asks Jesus to step aside & speaks with him): Jesus, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Could you tell her to help me!?

Jesus: Martha, Martha - you are worried and upset about many things. But but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.

Narrator: We don't know exactly how the story ends. Probably Martha finished making supper; maybe she cut the preparations short, so she too could join the guests and listen to Jesus. Soon they all sat down together. Certainly everyone learned some lessons that day about making time for the most important things.