

Deuteronomy 8:10-11, 17-18 (NIV)

¹⁰ When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God . . . ¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷ You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” ¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

Luke 10:38-42 (NIV)

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ 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!”

⁴¹ “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Romans 1:8-13 (NIV)

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. ⁹ God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

Let’s set the table and give thanks.

It’s a big occasion. Jesus has come for another visit. He had come often over the years, especially during the three big annual festivals of Passover, Weeks, and Booths. Jesus knew that the home of Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary, was always open to him and he often took advantage of it, since Bethany was only a couple of miles east of Jerusalem.

But this was certain to be the most well-attended visit yet. Jesus had begun revealing himself in village after village, and everyone would want to be around Jesus, even if only to catch a glimpse of him. And they would all need to be fed. This posed no problem for Martha, who was organized, disciplined, and hard-working. She was Type-A all the way. As for Mary . . . well, not so much.

Setting the Table

So Martha has welcomed Jesus into their home. And despite there being much work to do and a meal to prepare, Mary plops herself down at Jesus’ feet.¹ This is pretty much how things are with Martha and Mary. On a later occasion, when Jesus comes to Bethany after Lazarus’ death, Martha would go out to greet him, while Mary stays in

¹This is a shocking image. In the Jewish world, women did not sit at the feet of rabbis (teachers) as disciples (learners), yet Jesus’ teaching here is focused exclusively on women. Jesus doesn’t just teach that all persons are welcome at God’s table, he enacts it.

the house (John 11). Still later, Martha would prepare a meal, while Mary wipes Jesus' feet with her hair (John 12).

Can't you picture Martha. For awhile she is probably ok with Mary sitting with Jesus rather than helping out. But as time passes and Martha is left with everything, she begins to stew. She bangs the pots a little louder. Cabinets are closed with enthusiasm. Finally, she has had it and marches out to the living room – where she *tells* Jesus what he *must* do!! . . . Sound anything like a Thanksgiving or two you've been part of?

With great gentleness, Jesus criticizes Martha. He doesn't rebuke her for the work she is doing, but for her attitude toward Mary. Martha has forgotten that we do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Deuteronomy 8:3; Luke 4:4). Mary has chosen to focus all her attentions on the “main course”² – and Martha ought not criticize her for it. Still, it would be a mistake to be too hard on Martha or to elevate Mary. There is a time to go and do and a time to listen and learn.

I suspect that many of us have little trouble identifying with Martha on Thanksgiving. There is so much to do. Who has time to enjoy the fellowship . . . there is just so much to do! In a way, this problem goes far beyond the big family dinners. We are often overwhelmed by the frantic pace of our lives and the seemingly endless demands on our waking hours. Who has time to pray? Who has time to read the Bible? For many of us, it is probably easier to wade into our hectic schedules rather than adjust priorities or reconsider our choices.

Stephanie Frey writes, “It is easier, for example, to make a casserole for a grieving family than it is to offer a word of hope in Christ, easier to welcome a new neighbor with a fresh loaf of bread than to invite her to worship. . . . Worship becomes a ‘scheduling problem,’ one that interferes with the ‘one day we can sleep in.’”³ That stings but how many of us haven't said to ourselves at one time or another, “I just need to take this Sunday off.” Most of us probably run a much greater risk of having a Martha-problem (too much doing) than a Mary-problem (too much listening).

But as Frey goes on to say, “The good news is that Jesus the host has granted permission for all distracted, frantic people to sit down and eat their fill of word and promise. When we join them and nourish ourselves at the table, we'll be ready to put hands and feet, hearts and minds to work.”

Sitting at the table and remembering

Once the preparations are finished and the meal is served, we can sit and remember why we are there – to express our gratitude to God and for one another. You'd think we would always remember to be grateful to the One who made us, but we don't and it has always been this way. For example . . .

Today's passage from Deuteronomy is taken from Moses' final speech to the Israelites as they prepared to enter the Promised Land without him. He warns them that in this land of milk and honey it would be very easy to forget God. They would build fine homes. They would grow rich and comfortable. Being human, they would be tempted to stand on the mountaintops shouting for all to hear – “Look what I have done! Behold my accomplishments!” Moses knew how easy it would be for the Israelites to become “full of themselves,” thinking “I did all this. And all by myself. I'm rich. It's all mine!”⁴ How were the Israelites to avoid the temptation to forget God in their affluence and achievement? By keeping God's commandments, his instructions to them. Every day and in all ways, they were to love God and to love neighbor.

² A wonderful way of putting it from Peterson's paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*.

³ Stephanie Frey is a Lutheran pastor in Minnesota. This is from her reflections on Luke 10:38-42, “Living with Martha,” in *Christian Century*.

⁴ Also from Peterson's, *The Message*.

The Thanksgiving holiday is a great time to remember and to embrace anew the thankful hearts that ought to characterize us all year. In his book, *Prayer: finding the heart's true home*, Richard Foster writes, "Jesus was the ultimate grateful person. The signature written across his heart was the prayer 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth'" (Matthew 11:25). Jesus was of one heart and mind with the psalmist who wrote "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart" (Psalm 9:1) and with the writer of Hebrews, "let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name" (13:15).

And Jesus was of one heart and mind with the apostle Paul, who wrote "I thank God for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world" (Romans 1:8) in the introduction to his letter to the believers in Rome. Paul is truly thankful for all those who are part of his new family, his family in Christ. Though he knows some of the Christians who have now returned to Rome, he doesn't know most of the community. But he is thankful for them. He knows that when he finally comes to Rome, he will be encouraged by their faith, as I'm sure he was despite the circumstances of his arrival.⁵

Likewise, Paul is thankful for the Christians in Colossae⁶: "In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints." He urges them to be thankful, living out the new selves that they are in Christ.

Paul is thankful for the Christians in Thessalonica: "We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess. 1:2).

He is similarly thankful for the Christians in Corinth and in Philippi. Paul's thankfulness for all these people shines through his letters despite their many problems and issues.

As we still do and always shall, these first Christians would gather at the table to celebrate the Lord's Supper, reminding themselves that they had more for which to be grateful than they had ever imagined. As we gather with our families and friends this year, may we be grateful people of one heart and mind with our Lord.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. I think that given the choice between Martha (the doer) and Mary (the listener), most of us would identify with Martha. We are busy people, prone to being over-busy, and perhaps even taking pride in it. We are people who know how to get things done. If no one else will do it, we will. So how do we find the balance between doing and listening this Thanksgiving? Even more so, how do we build a life and a faith that holds together our head, our heart, and our hands – the vertical and horizontal? It is tempting here to plunge into a list of tips, tricks, and techniques for trying to achieve this balance, but I wonder if Jesus is urging us toward something a little more radical.
2. Do you find yourself truly excited about the many blessings you've been given by God? If not, what can we do to capture that sense of joy and excitement . . . an excitement and enthusiasm for God that is so consuming we couldn't help but tell others about it? Our spirit of thanksgiving would just come bursting out of us! Perhaps, we need to look beyond what God has "done for us lately" to the larger gift of being God's chosen and beloved. Such a gift is not meant to be hoarded; it is meant to be shared. For we at St. Andrew have been richly blessed by God. This community is a blessing to all who belong. Our challenge is always to remember

⁵ Paul doesn't get to Rome until the early 60's AD, and then it is as a prisoner of Rome. Though under house arrest, Paul was surely able to spend much time with the Christians in Rome.

⁶ Colossae was a city in southwestern Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). By Paul's day it was a city in decline, helped along by a calamitous earthquake in 60 or 61 AD.

that the charge given us by God is to be a blessing to others – to be the salt of the earth and the light to the world. Bright lights shine always and in all directions!
What are you doing to share your light with others?

Daily Bible Readings

This week: *More on gratitude*

Monday, Deuteronomy 6:1-9; 7:7-11 The fuller passage about remembering God

Tuesday, Psalm 111 One of the great psalms of thanksgiving

Wednesday, Psalm 105 Another psalm of thanksgiving

Thursday, Luke 17: 11-19 Jesus tells a story about some ungrateful lepers.

Friday, Luke 18:9-14 Giving thanks is meaningless if it is offered hypocritically.

Saturday, Colossians 1:3-14 Paul offers up thanks for the believers in Colossae.

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the gospel of John.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Samuel.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

November 19: "There's Something About Mary"