

Chapter 8: Martha of Bethany

Opening

Welcome & reminder about group dynamics.

- Listen first.
- Pay attention to who is speaking and who is not – make space for all.
- Remember confidential info is shared only in your group.
- Respect everyone's perspective and beliefs.

Centering Breath and Prayer

Breathe deeply as we lay aside the cares of the day. "Be still and know that I am God."

I weave a silence on to my lips.

I weave a silence onto my mind.

I weave a silence within my heart. I close my ears to distractions.

I close my eyes to attractions.

I close my heart to temptations.

Our God of the journey to the cross:

We come to you tonight, a bit closer to our destination of

Easter morning. You have continued to gently guide us toward knowing and accepting our part in your Son's destiny of pain and suffering.

As we study and discuss Martha's story, teach us Your ways of acceptance and advocacy, of repentance and resilience, of forgiveness and fulfillment, of praise and pro-activism.

As you did for the psalmist so long ago,

"Enlarge our path under us so our feet do not slip."

Bless us as we read, think, listen, and discuss. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Introduction 2

One of the first things we notice in the chapter for tonight is that Martha – and Mary – are named, which shows their importance as friends of Jesus. I never thought about this before but one of my sources made the point that Jesus needed friends, just as we do. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were his friends; he loved them.

We remember that Jesus was especially close to John, and perhaps other followers but he needed friends. And apparently, he felt comfortable stopping in Bethany for a meal at Martha's home, and bringing his entourage along. Quite a crowd – probably the disciples plus other followers! If you have entertained a large crowd, you can understand Martha's state of mind!

Scripture Lesson

Listen again to the story in Luke 10.

Voice 1: Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked,

Voice 2: "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me."

Voice 1: But the Lord answered her,

Voice 3: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Can you relate to Martha in our scripture for today’s chapter? Katey, our author, shared her experiences with entertaining: the planning, shopping, cleaning, food preparation, serving, clean-up. Along **3** the way she missed the opportunity to enjoy her guests.

Martha, being the elder sibling and running the household, found it difficult to get everything done for the large crowd staying for dinner. Perhaps you can relate to her challenge – I know I can! It’s not like she could run out to a store and pick up extra food. She must have been a woman of means with a well-stocked pantry to even consider hosting Jesus and those with him.

Several questions came to my mind as I read this familiar story again. There was obviously a lot to do, and Martha needed some help. Katey mentions that Jesus could have told Mary to help her sister. Or they could have moved their conversation to where Martha was working, and both could have helped her as they talked.

I remember a time when my husband and I invited a couple over for dinner. After their arrival, I excused myself to continue finishing the meal preparation, while Frank entertained our guests. Soon our guest, Jack, came to the kitchen to offer his help while our spouses continued talking! I thought that was so considerate of him. Maybe Martha would have appreciated Jesus’s help, too.

Breakout Groups: Discussion questions:

Questions: Which woman can you relate to? Perhaps both? Would you feel chastised by Jesus? What would have been your next move as Martha? Remember, introduce yourselves and tell where you are from.

Several groups share.

Women’s work: what is it? Has it changed over the centuries? We can see even in Bible times through Katey’s observations that women were trying to take charge of their lives. Sometimes they were successful, many times not.

Their status in society – class, wealth, prestige through their fathers, brothers, sons, or husbands – played a determining factor in their success. Even today in the Middle East, and many other places as well, this is still true. Controlling women’s independent leanings is very much a part of some cultures. In today’s world, Jesus doesn’t change culture; he changes our hearts so that we can change culture.

Martha also attempts to put Mary and Jesus on the spot through complaining to Jesus. She needs help and their friendship with him gives her permission to state her concern. But it’s her attitude, how she states her concern, that causes the problem. Again, I can relate to challenging Jesus when I feel wronged. Maybe you have done the same thing.

We often read in the Bible that the Psalms and Prophets’ words were shared in the temple. In the story of Jacob wrestling with God, Job and his many troubles, King David’s brushes with personal and kingdom battles, all railed against God, but eventually accepted God’s plan; these

stories were part of their religious services. I recently read a quote from Philip Yancey's book, *Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud* –

“One bold message in the book of Job is that you can say anything to God. Throw at him your grief, your

anger, your doubt, your bitterness, your betrayal, your **5** disappointment – [God] can absorb them all. As often as not, spiritual giants [maybe like our Martha?] spiritual giants of the Bible are shown **contending** with God. They prefer to go away limping, like Jacob, rather than to shut God out.”

It's comforting to me to know Martha felt she could complain to Jesus. In fact, I'm sure I have complained about my sister, brother, friends, co-workers, husband, knowing I would be understood and brought back to reality by a loving God.

Martha's lesson? Jesus needs us to do things **with** him not just **for** him. Our relationship with him can be like Velcro – stuck close but easily pulled away by chores, kids, internet, e-mails, meetings. None of these activities are bad in themselves but they can pull us away from time with God. Martha's job of preparing and serving her guests was taking her away from Jesus. Jesus was in the next room waiting for her to share time with him. Jesus is in the next room waiting to share time with us.

Social Action in Today's World

The key word for this chapter title is **ADVOCATE**. As a noun, *advocate* is familiar to us as a “counselor, pleader, spokesperson.” We are reminded that the Holy Spirit acts as our advocate with God. When used as a verb, *to advocate* means “to support someone or some cause **actively**.”

As Christians and United Methodist Women, we want to advocate for women, youth, and children as they find their place in God's world, the right spot just for them, where they can care for their families, feel personally successful, and serve God. God calls us to be advocates, to speak and act boldly, **whether or not** we believe we are qualified. We are needed to carry on this vital work.

Women's work is often a topic of discussion these days. Our feminist leanings or support for traditional roles or somewhere in between the two, can get us into huge debates!

I received over the holidays, *How Lovely the Ruins, 6 Inspirational Poems and Words for Difficult Times*. This poem talks about the meaning of “women's work.” The title is, “I Have No Quarrel with You,” by Florence Brooks Whitehouse.

“I Have No Quarrel with You” by Florence Brooks Whitehouse

I have no quarrel with you, but I stand
For the clear right to hold my life my own,
The clean, clear right. To mold it as I will,
Not as you will, with or apart from you;
To make of it a thing of brain and blood,
Of tangible substance and of turbulent thought. No thin gray shadow of the life of man.
Your love, perchance, may set a crown upon it; But I may crown myself in other ways.
As you have done who are one flesh with me.
I have no quarrel with you – but henceforth,

This you must know; the world is mine, as yours,
The pulsing strength and passion and heart of
it; The work I set my hand to, women's work,
Because I set my hand to it.

We hope for all to find their work in God's world, something they feel comfortable doing and a job they receive a fair wage for completing.

Katey shared in Chapter 8 about the low priority many women and men's jobs have. We can see this by the low wages, lack of insurance and childcare options or family leave available to these essential workers. This has been so obvious during the pandemic: a real wake-up call as we struggle to make things right for those who have risked and lost so much this past year. Government action and unionizing for better conditions and benefits along with a livable wage would help to ease their burdens and lead to healthier, happier families and a more successful nation.

Worldwide at least 53 million people are employed as domestic workers including nannies, cooks, drivers, home health care workers, maids, gardeners, and others. As Katey says, we entrust them with

our most precious spaces and people. Our support and advocacy **7** for these workers can truly lead to better lives and a progressive nation that lights the way for other countries.

Let's go into our groups for about 8 minutes and share some ideas about how we can help to bring about changes where we live to make a difference in the working lives of those who are struggling in our communities.

Would you share a few of the ideas from your group?

Closing

Thanks so much for your attention and shared ideas tonight. I hope you can take something back to your units and churches that might make a difference in your communities!

Let's close with prayer... Understanding God,

We have much to learn from your servants, Mary and Martha. Service should not be a substitute for worship and devotion but *evidence* of our love for You.

Our relationship with You cannot be stagnant but we should strive for different dimensions, textures, and facets so that we can reach many for Your kingdom in the best ways possible.

Guide our stumbling steps as we continue to actively search for Your will for our lives, for United Methodist Women and for our churches. May others be brought to a healing, fulfilling knowledge of Your grace for all.

In the name of our Brother and Friend, Jesus. Amen.

This session was created by Becky Ruppel.

