



Introduction

The following questions, prayers and comments are intended to assist you through a Bible study time this summer. Watch on Facebook Live or commhope.freeonlinechurch.com/live at 9 am on Sundays. This study and Pastor John's sermons will cover 15 men & women of the Bible. Weekly studies like these will be available each week. If you have any questions, please e-mail koko@commhope.org.

Week 14: Mary of Bethany - A Mite and a Jar of Perfume

Prayer of preparation: Holy Father, I am so grateful for the life, family, work, time, and opportunities you have given me in such a gracious and loving way. Help me enrich our relationship by looking carefully for the message you have for me in this study. Amen.

Comments and references: Please, read Luke 10:38-42, John 11:1-44 and John 12:1-8

This story begins as a story about Mary and Martha of Bethany. I have never explored beyond the Sunday School presentation, of the two sisters being unhappy with each other over the preparation of a meal for Jesus and his disciples. Never having had a sister, I did not relate to the message all that well. However, in exploring it further I realized I had dodged a lot the inspiring message contained in this story.

Martha, like Peter's brother Andrew when he introduced Peter to Jesus, is the one that brings Jesus home to meet her family, Mary and Lazarus, see Luke 10:38. Martha expresses her recognition of who Jesus is, by serving him and his friends a meal and by introducing her family to Jesus.

"Who are Mary and Martha in Christian Tradition?"

The sisters appear in many postbiblical traditions. Early Christians often interpreted Luke 10:38-42 as depicting active (Martha) and contemplative (Mary) vocations. Some later texts and artifacts depict the sisters at the cross and resurrection. The first usage of the title "apostle to the apostles" (third century) refers to Martha and Mary, not to Mary Magdalene. This tradition endures in the Orthodox icon of the holy myrrh-bearing women, including Mary, Martha, and Mary Magdalene.

The gospels name only one Martha, but multiple Marys: Mary of Nazareth (Jesus' mother), Mary of Bethany (Martha's sister), and Mary Magdalene. Because of their similar names, early Christians sometimes confused Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany. Contemporary scholars have perpetuated the confusion by identifying the Mary mentioned in some ancient texts (such as the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Thomas) as Mary Magdalene. However, in these texts, Mary is often not called "Magdalene"; she appears with Martha, she poses at Jesus' feet; she is criticized by a disciple; she is defended by Jesus or a disciple; and she is a beloved disciple, commended by Jesus." (see Beavis 2013).

Mary Ann Beavis, "Mary and Martha", n.p. [cited 25 Aug 2020].

Online: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/en/people/main-articles/mary-and-martha>

Like all the people of the Bible that we have studied, so far this summer, Mary and her sister Martha experience the living grace of God as they pursue their relationship with Jesus. In John 11:27 Martha confesses that Jesus is the Messiah! Even though, in her initial attempt at relationship with Jesus, she becomes "distracted" by the enactment of her service, she recognizes that her salvation, and that of everyone else, is found in Jesus. Rahab recognized that the spies she housed were of God, in Matthew

16:13 Peter recognizes Jesus and here Martha understands who Jesus is, while others do not yet understand. Whereas, Martha stumbled in the giving of her gift, Mary seemed to grow steadily in her faith from her first meeting with Jesus. *“On the basis of these incidents, many Christian writers have seen Mary as representing Contemplation (prayer and devotion), and Martha as representing Action (good works, helping others); or love of God and love of neighbor respectively.”* Biographical sketches of memorable Christians of the past <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/213.html>

We meet Mary and Martha again in John 11:20, when Jesus is coming to their house because He has been told that their brother Lazarus is dead. Mary and Martha utter very similar words when they greet Jesus. Martha says, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”, see John 11: 21 & 22. She indicates she is still hoping for a miraculous event. Mary, upon being called to greet Jesus says, “Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died” see John 11:32. She is overwhelmingly sad and shares her grief with Jesus, who also, “weeps”, see John 11:35. Mary is consistently in spiritual and emotional relationship with Jesus. Martha is focused on the actions of love and grace. Together, they are a marvelous illustration of the faith and works we are called to by, all of the characters we study out of our Bibles, see James 2:18+, Hebrews 11:6, Philippians 2:2, Ephesians 2:8, Acts 26:20, Romans 3:28 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11.

We find another illustration of Mary’s spiritual connection with Jesus in John 12:1-8. I came across a video created by two fellows that call their organization “The Skit Guys”. You may remember last Christmas we used their videos to explore 5 people involved in the story of Jesus birthday; event and prediction. Those videos were powerful illustrations and so is the one about Mary of Bethany. I had been understanding Martha as a woman of active faith; doing the deeds of grace. And, I was seeing Mary as meditating on what she was learning about faith, love and Jesus. As I watched this video, I reassessed my estimation of Mary.

The woman portraying Mary in this video does a wonderful job of showing how the growing love she had for Jesus spurred her to give to Jesus. She worshipped Him, she gave Him a gift that would take a common laborer, of that time, a year to afford, she made a plan to bless Him and brought her jar of perfume with her to dinner at Simon the Leper’s house, where her sister is, again serving dinner. Please, check out the video at this address: https://skitguys.com/videos/mary-of-bethany?gclid=EAlaIqobChMIh7CF4ZO06wIVCaCzCh0s5w9WEAAAYASAAEgKMfPD_BwE

Often, when we as Christians talk about giving to Jesus, it is associated with sacrifice. To me sacrificing is painful and negative; not that we are not called, and should be able, to sacrifice for God. In this video I saw a woman so moved by the love and grace of God that she delighted in giving her gift. It seemed to give her every bit as much pleasure, as it did for Jesus to receive it. It made me think of imagining, shopping for, obtaining, wrapping, putting just the right words on a card, giving my gift to a precious person and then feeling the thrill, of my precious one, opening the gift! This story and the gift of the Widow’s Mite see Luke 21:1-4, are the Mary & Martha of serving our Lord.

Prayer: Jesus help me to live in the light of your love; to sink in it and wallow in it until, like a bath when my fingers get all pruned! The joy of your love gives me strength and I believe I can do all things when you strengthen me. Amen.