

This is going to be controversial . I am going to address a question to the females. Please raise your hand if you have ever left a bed unmade on your way out of the house in the morning? Now in the interests of equality to the males .

Please raise your hand if you have ever left a bed unmade on your way out of the house in the morning? Now to both of you Does it cause you to feel ashamed that you have left a bed unmade on your way out of the house in the morning?

How many have left dirty dishes in the sink when they have gone to bed at night? It happens all the time in our house, but whoever gets up first washes the dishes and then I take Shirley a cup of coffee in bed.

How many of you tried to dress up a ready prepared M and S with a lettuce leaf here some chives there and a slice of lemon so it looks as if you have spent hours preparing for a posh dinner party.

Is there anyone like me who when the guests arrived and were settled, went into the kitchen and then out of the back door to collect the take away, then put it into our own serving dishes and passed it off as your own creation?

I did it once and then a few years later in an unguarded moment admitted that I had done it.

Our friends said they had realised but had been too polite to mention it

<sup>38</sup> As Jesus and his disciples went on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him in her home. <sup>39</sup> She had a sister named Mary, who sat down at the feet of the Lord and listened to his teaching. <sup>40</sup> Martha was upset over all the work she had to do, so she came and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me!"

<sup>41</sup> The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha! You are worried and troubled over so many things, <sup>42</sup> but just one is needed. Mary has chosen the right thing, and it will not be taken away from her."

Whenever I read this scripture passage in public, I can just see some of the women bristle . And I know I'll probably hear about it later. The story may touch more feminist nerves than any other gospel story!

It may be that some women feel they have been labeled as a Mary or a Martha, when in fact they see themselves as a bit of both.

It may be that they've heard this story used against women.

It may be that they hear the words of Jesus as degrading to the work they consider very valuable.

After all, people have to eat, and if somebody doesn't do the work,

*Jesus, you know it won't get done by itself. I don't see any of your twelve male friends getting up to help out in the kitchen.*

Often, women are the ones who do the work of taking care of those around them.

And they don't appreciate being told that it isn't enough.

It is interesting that Luke puts this story right after the one we call The Good Samaritan.

It seems to be a story which celebrates the active caring of the Samaritan traveller as opposed to the negligence of the other two passersby.

Then comes this story of Martha and Mary, where the doing is said to be too much, and the sitting and being is rewarded. What are we to make of it all?

I think we must make of it exactly what it is. Life with Jesus is rarely an either/or kind of life.

It is more often both/and.

To say both/and sounds as though we must do everything all the time —the doing *and* the being— when this story specifically challenges that idea.

We are human and, generally, can only do one thing at a time if we want to do it well.

That's not the way we live much of the time, though, is it?

We watch television while eating a family meal;

we talk on the phone while working on the computer;

we sit in a meeting and make lists of things we need to do when the meeting is over.

I was crossing the road outside our house and the driver of the car was turning the corner whilst texting.  
Now that's double tasking!

But they couldn't indicate because that would be triple tasking.

Note I am not saying if the driver was male or female that would be dynamite to say.

You know what it's like. When you're double tasking on the phone and computer,  
your full attention is in neither place.

The way Luke's gospel arranges these stories, they appear to strike some kind of balance for us.  
A man walking down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho must make a decision  
whether to continue on his way toward whatever business he had there,  
or to stop and help, a proposition which cost him both money and time.

Yet it does not appear as though he struggled with his decision about whether or not to help.  
He simply did what had to be done. Martha, though, struggles with what to do.

There are competing interests in her story as well.

Should she care for the needs of others, or attend to the needs of her own soul?

It appears that she is used to taking care of others and leaving herself and her needs for last.

The problem with making caregiving our only way of life is that we stop listening for the voice of God.

It is easier to do than it is to be still, even for a few moments. And so we just keep moving.

Maybe we, like Martha, have forgotten that we have choices to make.

She seems to assume that all the work must be done before there is any sitting and listening.

We know that all the work is *never* done.

And of course, we have to mention the gender elements of the story.

It was a woman's place to serve the men, not to sit with them and listen to the teacher talk about God.

Jesus turned both of these ideas upside down. Of course a woman has the right to sit and listen.

How could it be otherwise in God's kingdom?

And, please, just let some of the work wait. You haven't given yourself permission to sit and listen in a very  
long time. Do you even know what that feels like anymore?

So, I'm giving you permission not to make the beds.

I am not ashamed to admit that Shirley and I have given each other that permission.

Let the dishes soak in the bowl over night, they may be easier to wash and easier to see if the clean in the  
clear light of day.

Dont be ashamed to get the M and s dinner for two.

In fact get two lots and that will see you through the weekend.

And the two bottles of wine which you get may make feel merry than feel guilty.

Maybe not every weekend or the food police will arrest both of us, but when it's been a long day and you  
want to reconnect with the people you love, go for it.

Allow yourself to make decisions about what is right for you,  
about what will remind you of the important things.

Allow yourself to do the things that take care of others,  
and allow yourself to stop doing for others  
and take care of yourself by being in God's presence.