Mary and Martha February 19, 2023

**Bible Verses:** Luke 10:38-42

**Spark Story Bible:** pages 366 to 371

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Overall Lesson Takeaways

* **The value of listening in a world that values action.**

I’d imagine many of us have read this Mary and Martha account and wondered why exactly Martha was seen as being in the wrong.. She was, after all, following cultural norms around hosting! But Jesus’ praise of Mary doesn’t invalidate the role of action and doing in our faith – in fact, the parable of the Good Samaritan (a story centered around giving/service) immediately precedes the Mary and Martha passage. Instead, this passage raises questions about when we are called to listen and when we are called to act. Listening and action aren’t opposed to one another. Quite the opposite: they inform one another! One of my favorite models for this is the *praxis* model (the theological concept, not the teacher certification process). *Praxis* is an ongoing cycle of action and reflection in which those two things feed one another; action without reflection is empty, and reflection without action is useless. Perhaps Mary is a model for us of how, even in the midst of busyness, we are called to step back and listen.

* **We all have some Martha in us, and we all have some Mary.**

The temptation in reading this passage has always been to mentally assign ourselves and others into two categories of people: the Marthas who are too busy running around to notice Jesus in their midst, and the Marys who calmly receive Jesus with open hearts and minds. If only we could be Mary… or at the very least stop being Martha! But I think the reality is that all of us have aspects of Martha’s action and Mary’s reflection within us – and, as noted above, those two things should feed one another. Luke certainly seems to prize action and doing – social justice and charity are hallmarks of his gospel. But doing those things without listening to Jesus’ words and allowing our work to be informed by his teachings would render our actions meaningless. So, how can we discern when it is time to listen, or time to act?

* **Is hosting about preparations, or people?**

Finally, we should note a common interpretation of this parable that has some layer of truth to it: questioning whether Martha’s (and our modern) instance on serving our house guests’ every need distracts us from the more important thing of focusing on spending time with our guests. Kids may not have experienced this dilemma very much, but my guess is that they’ve probably observed their parents put in hours of energy into hosting! It would be interesting to hear their perspective – and to discuss how we can be more mindful about time with those we care for.

Checking In

**Before the reading:**

* **Check in with the kids – welcoming any newcomers warmly.**
  + Younger kids: What is something you want to learn how to do?
  + Older kids: Highs and Lows from the past week
* **What do you like more: moving or sitting still? What are things you like to do moving around? What are things you do sitting still?**

Bible Lesson / Discussion

**Reading the Bible:**

* Today, we are reading about Jesus visiting two sisters who had very different responses to Jesus’ visit!
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
  + Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
  + Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!

**Questions About the Passage** (see next page for PreK/K questions)

* Everything that Martha was doing was trying to be a good host! Why do you think Jesus asked her to sit and listen?
* When your family has someone over to visit, are they more like Martha (busy) or more like Mary (calm)?

**Connections to Our Lives**

* Has the pandemic made your family’s life less busy or more busy? What is nice about being busy, and what is hard about it?
* Being busy isn’t a bad thing, but sometimes it can distract us from what’s most important. How do we know when its time to move and be busy, and when its time to sit and be still?

**Biblical/Church Connections**

* This upcoming Wednesday is called Ash Wednesday, which is the start of the season of Lent. Lent is a 40 day (46 with Sundays!) time of preparation that we use to get ready for Easter – sometimes through the practice of giving things up. Have you ever given anything up before?

**Alternate Preschool and K/1st Questions**

Younger ages, particularly those in our preschool class, may have a hard time discussing the biblical text for very long (if at all). My hope is that these questions (and especially the activity) can help with engagement!

**Opening Questions / Activity**

* **Take some time to welcome / get to know the kids!**
  + What does being “busy” mean? When was the last time you felt really busy, either at school or with your family?
  + What do you like more: moving around or sitting still? What are things you like to do while moving? How about sitting still?

**Warm Up Game – What’s In Common?**

* We’re going to play a game to see if it’s easier to listen when you’re sitting still or when you’re moving around. Explain that you’ll say three different objects and kids have to figure out what color they have in common…
* For example: Football, Tree Trunk, Chocolate…. BROWN
  + Sitting: Apple, Ladybug, Strawberry… RED
  + Sitting: Leaf, Cactus, Peas… GREEN
  + Jumping: Basketball, Carrot, Goldfish…. ORANGE
  + Jumping: Star, Cheese, Banana… YELLOW
* Play as long as kids are having fun, then transition to the Bible questions.

**Bible Discussion/Questions**

* Our Bible story today is about how two people chose to spend time with Jesus when he visited their house – one was busy, one was still.
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
  + Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
  + Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!
* How do you feel if someone isn’t listening to you when you’re talking? How might other people feel if we don’t listen?
* What can make us better listeners?
* Being busy isn’t a bad thing – but sometimes it means that its really hard to listen.Martha was so busy getting everything ready around the house that she wasn’t able to spend time listening to Jesus! How do we know when its time to move and be busy, and when its time to sit and be still?

People of Faith

In addition to reading our weekly Bible story, I'd love for our older grade school students to learn more about people whose lives were changed by their faith in Jesus. We'll lift up a new person each Sunday, trying to connect their story to our Bible passage as much as possible!

**Sojourner Truth**

Even though our passage today is about knowing when to listen, it’s important to remember there are also times when we need to take action - and Sojourner Truth is an inspiring example who changed the world through her actions!

Born into slavery in 1797, Truth’s early years were terrible and harsh. She was forced to work for cruel people – and even though New York (where she lived) had begun to abolish slavery when she was two years old, they wouldn’t complete that legislation until 1827. After her owner broke a promise about setting her free, Truth realized that she needed to take matters into her own hands. She managed to escape with her infant daughter and was taken in by a couple whose Christian faith inspired her to become a Christian as well. Later, after New York officially abolished slavery in 1827, Truth brought her former owner to court after he illegally sold one of her sons – winning the case.

These early experiences would help inspire Truth in the second half of her life – she chose the name Sojourner Truth after feeling called by God to be a voice seeking to end slavery in the United States. Over the next decade, she became a Methodist and would preach to hundreds of different audiences about the evils of slavery – and it should be noted that as a Black woman she faced two types of discrimination. Nonetheless, her powerful speaking drew attention from many and she became a leading voice both for abolishing slavery as well as for women’s rights.

She would later move to Michigan, but stayed involved nationally – recruiting troops to fight for the Union during the Civil War, and advocating for the government to set aside land for those who had formerly been enslaved. Although her efforts on the latter were unsuccessful, Truth is now recognized and honored for her tireless dedication to fighting the injustice of slavery and women not being allowed to vote – and she was named by the Smithsonian as being one of the “100 Most Significant Americans of All-Time”.

Crafts / Activities

**Mary and Martha “Listening” Ears**

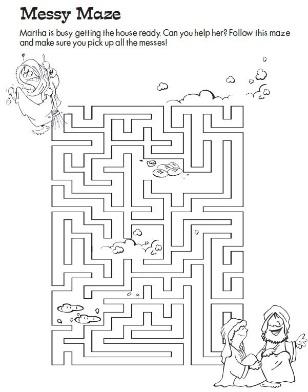
**(Ages 5+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Markers/Crayons
* Scissors

Instructions:

* This craft is admittedly ridiculous, but I think that’s part of the fun. Kids will color, cut-out, and assemble their own over-sized ears to remind them of the importance of listening.

**Mary and Martha Maze**

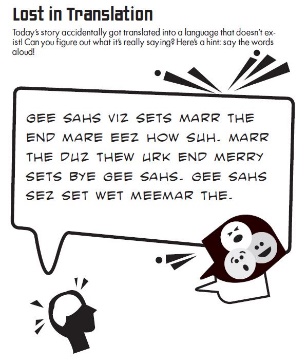
**(Ages 5+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* This handout is a simple maze that hits the sweet spot between being challenging enough to be fun, but not so hard that it is frustrating!

**Mary and Martha Word Puzzle**

**(Ages 7+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* This puzzle is a bit of a stretch, but kids may still enjoy deciphering what it says – at the very least it can be a reminder of what our passage was!

Biblical Background – Mary and Martha[[1]](#footnote-1)

This Mary and Martha passage is a good opportunity to correct an inaccurate assumption that is often made: that Jesus’ followers were almost entirely men. This view has undoubtedly been shaped by how patriarchal Christianity became as it moved into the 2nd century – but, both in Jesus’ time and in the early days of the church, women were a vital part of Jesus’ ministry.

So, who were Martha and Mary? Is this Mary Magdalene? The short answer to the second question is… probably not. Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene (as well as the woman who places the expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet) were historically interpreted as being the same person, but there are many questions today about whether this is accurate. Mary was unfortunately one of (if not the most) common female names in 1st century Judea and there is certainly lots of confusion about which biblical Mary was whom. There may be five different Marys in the Gospels – or perhaps even six if the tradition that Salome was known as Mary Salome is true: Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2); Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42); Mary of Jacob (Luke 24:10); and Mary of Clopas (John 19:25).

As for Martha, while we know from the Gospel of John that she and Mary are Lazarus’ sisters and appear when he is raised, we unfortunately don’t know terribly much more about her. Regardless, it seems more than plausible that both of these women remained an active part of the early church – especially in light of Luke 10:39, which states that Mary “sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying”. That specific language was only used in the ancient world for describing someone’s disciple – which, as historians have noted, it would have been extremely radical for Jesus to openly accept female disciples!

Nonetheless, based on the Gospels’ accounts of women being the first to find the empty tomb on Easter, discussions and depictions of Jesus both speaking with and accepting women as followers, and accounts of the early church which show women having a clear role, it’s safe to say that Jesus viewed women as equal partners in ministry, even if the later church did not.

1. Your ability to share this info with kids will vary depending on their age – this section is mainly written for teachers and parents to learn a bit more about the background to each week's passage! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)