

“But Which Thing?”

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way,
Jesus 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,
“Lord, do you not care that my sister
has left me to do all the work by myself?
Tell her then to help me.”

But the Lord answered her, “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.”

But Which Thing?

Luke 10:38-42

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I.

When I sat down to write this sermon I had but two modest goals. The first was to LIGHTEN UP. Of late, I have been spending *way* too much time at Jesus' feet endeavoring to figure out what God might be trying to say to me these days and, if I am being honest, not getting very far in the task. Second, I wanted to tell you about my water bottle. As I said, modest goals.

However, the problem is I have no idea how these two goals necessarily relate to each other (if at all) and, further, no idea of how I might connect and tie these together with today's sermon text from Luke chapter 10, the story of Mary and Martha. Choosing not to be dissuaded, I decided just to forge on ahead quietly satisfied to simply be on our way with little regard to where this sermon might actually end up.

II.

I have decided that this summer I would mostly take a break from the news. Oh, I usually do a quick check of the regional headlines by going online to the Watertown Daily Times, and I try to keep abreast of local happenings through the North Country Now website. Every once in a while, usually while eating my breakfast, I will do a quick scroll through the U.S. News and World Report, or Politico sites, as well as the BBC and CBC for more of an international perspective.

One day last week a small blurb happened to catch my attention. It read, "Walmart Recalls Water Bottles Nationwide Over Vision Loss" (click [here](#) to read the article) with a photo of what looked to be the very same water bottle I, myself, had purchased a few months ago at the Potsdam Wally World. Like you, I take note of the recall notices for all kinds of products ranging from cars to food. Seldom, however, do they have anything to do with me...until now.



III.

I am sure you will all agree that when you read in the news that a product *you* use is causing vision loss, you sit up and take notice. So, of course, I was always going to click on the article and read further. However, what got me *really* curious is just how a water bottle, which is a fairly basic and simple thing, might cause vision loss?

Now, before we go any further I would like you to understand that I drink a lot of water; mostly for health and cost reasons. Other than three cups of half-caf coffee in the morning and one can of Coke Zero in the afternoon, water is all that I drink. I always have two bottles chilling in the fridge. Last spring I decided it was time to replace the two plastic bottles I had been using with metal. After an extensive web search I settled on these Ozark Trail 64 oz Stainless Steel Insulated Water Bottles reasonably priced at \$15 and available at Walmart in Potsdam. With these I have been greatly satisfied.

IV.

Clicking to the article about the recall, here is what it said:

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) found (the bottles) to pose a risk of serious impact and laceration injuries because of the screw-on lid potentially ejecting forcefully when opened.

The CPSC stated: "When a consumer attempts to open the bottles after food, carbonated beverages or perishable beverages, such as juice or milk, are stored inside over time, the lid can eject forcefully (when opened)."

Not quite sure I was reading what I thought I was reading, I read it again, and then a third time. If I am missing something, please tell me. It would seem that when people stored food or drink that either already contained carbonation, or created gas due to the fermentation process either from how it is created or brewed, or by letting it sit too long and (essentially) rot in the bottle, a few people (three) were hit in the eye when they went to remove the top as the force of the trapped gases ejected the cap *as it was being unscrewed* (not out of nowhere or of its own volition).

V.

I thought about this for awhile. After all, I certainly do not wish to do anything that might damage my eyes or would negatively affect my vision. Here is what I concluded:

First, since I only put water into these bottles I decided it was safe for me to continue using mine. No carbonation, or possibility of fermentation, means there is no chance of the cap being forcibly ejected.

Second, rather than a malfunction of or flaw in the product, these water bottles actually work *too* well in that the cap provides too tight of an airtight seal. Which, if you are looking for a water bottle that doesn't leak, is exactly what you want. If it didn't provide an airtight seal (i.e. if it did not work as it was intended) any gases from carbonation or fermentation would leak out and relieve any pressure that might build up behind the cap.

Third, the real problem with these bottles are the (three) people who cannot figure out one must unscrew the cap *slowly* to release any built-up pressure and, further, to not point them at their eye when doing so.

VI.

The result of all this is that I had better be careful with my Ozark Trail Water Bottles, as I will never be able to replace them with the same as they have all been pulled from the shelves and, no doubt, discontinued. The other result, based on this line of reasoning, is that we should all expect every single bottle of champagne to soon be pulled from stores all across the country as it is just a matter of time before one or two people hurt themselves from all the popping corks. As the old saying goes, it is all fun and games until someone loses an eye. So, just to be safe, we are going to remove any possibility of "user error"; however ridiculous that may be.

On, now, to our scripture reading for today: Luke 10:38-42, the story of Mary and Martha. Or, more accurately, the first of two stories about Mary and Martha to be found in the Bible. In John 11 we find the other story featuring these two sisters (which we can only presume occurs later) that relates the events surrounding Jesus raising of their brother, Lazarus, from the dead.

VII.

Interestingly, though each story may be well known to us, neither the author of Matthew or the author of John seem to have any awareness of the other's story, though each is profoundly significant in its own unique way. Between the two tales we can deduce that Jesus is well acquainted with these siblings, considers them to be close friends and, apparently, is a frequent guest of theirs while traveling to, or through, the town of Bethany.

The Lucan story finds Martha, seemingly the older of the two, asking Jesus to encourage Mary to give her a hand with the meal preparation. Instead, Jesus gently reminds Martha that she need not be so worried or anxious about her many tasks, that there is need of only one thing, and that Mary has chosen the better part. Many Biblical scholars correctly note that sitting at the feet of a Rabbi, or teacher, to garner instruction and gain insight was a position reserved solely for men.

VIII.

Consequently, this text is often cited to indicate the propriety and importance woman in the early church, and the critical role they occupy in our shared ecclesiastical life. Of course, this is something about which all of us are already fully aware based our own first-hand experience. Generally speaking, not only are women the ones who make the church work, they are the ones who do most of the work in just about any church (certainly any church I have ever known).

This text is also often used to underscore the importance of selecting the correct priorities and keeping one's priorities straight, as well as a reminder to guard against getting overwhelmed by the sheer weight of the world and the burdens of our daily responsibilities.

IX.

All of that said, Martha often gets a bad rap for being overly concerned with pragmatic considerations, while her sister, Mary, is lifted up and praised for choosing the pious over the practical. Believe you me, though, if Martha had joined Mary at Jesus' feet and the result was there would be no meal for Jesus and the disciples to enjoy following their period of instruction, the ending of this story would probably have been quite different. No one wishes to experience a "hangry" Jesus.

While I may be embellishing a bit here, the fact is Jesus could have easily encouraged Martha to put down the dish towel and join her sister in receiving his teaching. Instead, Mary remained at his feet while Martha went back to work. Which begs the question about the meaning behind Jesus saying, “Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” Are we to take this to mean that Mary’s choice was better for *her* in *this* instance, or better for *anyone* in *every* instance? Based strictly on the text itself, we must conclude that what is clearly good for goose is not necessarily good for the gander. Moreover, perhaps the real lesson of this story is to be the goose, or gander, whom you have been called to be.

X.

One of the certitudes I have come to accept over the span of the past three decades is there while there might be, and must be, one faith that fits all, how we receive and express that faith as individuals will vary greatly from one person to the next. As illustrated in the story of Mary and Martha, while each may have a “better” thing to choose the question becomes *which* thing is that? Correspondingly, how do we each do *our* thing while, at the same time, allowing those around us to do *their* thing; especially as we live and work together as the body of Christ?

While I strongly believe in the truth and rightness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it has been my experience that at some point or another each of us uses the right thing in the wrong way. We take things too far, we say dumb things, we act inappropriately, we become fixated on a certain outcome, we allow ourselves to act in ways which feel righteous and justifiable in the moment but which we later come to greatly regret. In short, we must admit one aspect of faith is the unfortunate occurrence of “user error.”

XI.

While there is no question that recalling every last Ozark Trail 64 oz Stainless Steel Insulated Water Bottle will prevent *all* possibility of *any* future harm due to user error, there is no recalling of our faith. Rather than seeking solutions that are extreme, reactionary, or unreasonable (as is the case with the water bottle) we should endeavor to learn from our errors, become wiser consumers of our faith and, next time, remember to uncap ourselves slowly and gently so as to allow the release of any built-up pressure and, most

importantly, avoid hitting ourselves in the eye with something that is clearly staring us right in the face.

Regardless of what happens, or why, we must continue to use our faith in the very best ways we can to the Glory of God, on behalf of God's Kingdom, and in service to the all of God's children. That is the "thing" to which every last one of us should be endeavoring, and from which we should never be dissuaded. Let us forge on ahead quietly satisfied to simply be on our way. Amen.