

Was Jesus discipling?

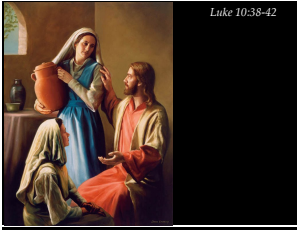
Luke 10:38-41

July 2022

Luke 10:38-42 (ESV)

³⁸Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things,⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Intro:



I wonder if anyone has been waiting for yet another sermon on the Mary and Martha story we have just heard?

It's a proverbial story about two sisters and Jesus that lives in our awareness as true to life and challenging.

In popular Christian perception Mary and Martha often represented those who merely talked about things and those who did what was needed. In the Protestant work ethic guess who was seen as the champion?

Let's ask:

Q1 What have you heard said or learn from this to date?

- What does it say about Jesus?
 - Jesus is going to his death and affirms those who take the time they can with him.
- What might it say about women?
 - Jesus has time for women and values them.
- What might it say about hospitality?
 - The hospitality Jesus really values is people connecting and relational focused because that is what advances God's purposes - more than hospitality that meets needs.

--Invite responses and discuss--

Development:

I want to move beyond that and ask what may be a new question:

Jesus is described as 'teaching' as Mary sat at his feet.

From this I wonder:

Q2 What were Jesus and Mary talking about while Martha did the practical work of hospitality? What was the business or purpose there?

Q3 clue: How do you teach people who sit at your feet?

Towards answering this, we know that Jesus' big theme and teaching purpose was to call people to enter and embrace the Kingdom of God.

That meant he spoke about seeking to live in God's calling, provision and direction in his kingly reign.

This was the longing of Israel to reverse the alienation and curse of the fall from what God had made us to be. A big part of that was recovering a vision of God as Abba-Father or 'Our heavenly Daddy'

So when Jesus taught, this is what he spoke about whether to 5000 men and associates or individuals who came to him such as the Jewish elder Nicodemus or the unnamed Rich Young Ruler.

Now if we appreciate something about group dynamics this will help us.
In teaching a hundred people one tends to present and engage in wider general terms.

When teaching a single person the content is adapted or tailored to suit them and there is room for interaction or, feedback and reflection.

In speaking to a larger group from three or so upwards teaching tends to be about telling people things that influence them more generally. What they do with that is all up to them – unless there is a formal exam or evaluation. The parables of Jesus were offered like that in the public setting and only in private with the twelve did Jesus explain and apply them.

Here with Mary, up close and personal teaching becomes discipleship. The personal relationship is there.

Where we actually sit and how we sit reflects our relationship with what is happening and who is speaking.

Are we all in and on-board or are we carefully parked at distance able to listen but with an eye on the door – just in case?! Yes, there might be a bit of that here in church too?

So, to repeat, this personal one-on-one or one-on-a-few (Peter, James and John?) style of teaching looks like what I understand as discipleship.

It's teaching at the level of being coached, held to account, advised, engaged in reflection, challenged and encouraged in the ways of God as pioneered by Jesus.

Jesus was pleased that Mary chose for this which suggests she set the scene for this interaction. She could easily have avoided it or run out to the kitchen to attend to valid tasks but no, she prioritized being taught as a disciple of the Kingdom by Jesus. With Mary at his feet Jesus uses the word 'distracted' to describe Martha not being there. She was 'distracted' with practicalities.

That sounds so familiar both in my life and my experience of Church. When we meet whether, Vestry, Synod or wherever. What do we talk about? Discipleship or... practicalities and provisions?

Martha is in no way berated by Jesus but it's her sister who made the better choice even if Martha got dinner ready.

Are there any women here now who want to scream?

How do you and we resolve this both for women and all of us in God's household?

So that's my latest reflection on this account.

Q4 What do you think of that reading of this account? *Comment?*

Application:

Upon coming to St Matthew's I happily adopted one of the existing logos

It links this church strongly to Jesus and his call to discipleship.



Meanwhile St Matt's is a church and does church things in ways that have been shaped over the centuries.

I have found myself asking the question:

Q5a How do we actually grow disciples?

or,

Q5b How do we expect that to happen?

Any clues?

Q5c What is the plan?

- Is there an understanding or a working strategy?
- Who actually does this work of growing disciples or is it a general outcome from being church?

Conclusion

I suggest from this story of Jesus and from my own experience that it happens best in personal conversations between trusting people seeking to know and live God's way in Jesus Christ.

When we live our life less personally in the larger group setting the 'teaching' tends to be processed as information and general instruction instead of as coaching or personal training with accountability.

Something that needs to be active in this may not be natural to us?

There needs to be a faith that Jesus speaks to us through others. Just as we are baptized in his Spirit so others are too and they may bring his word, his love, his rebuke, his encouragement to us.

Discipleship happens between the people of Jesus so we need to recognize that Jesus uses our brothers and sister to do that.

Illustration

About 40 years ago I had a remarkable discipleship conversation with a man a few years younger than myself when I was in my early 20s. He was a dynamic young man who started well with the Lord but had backslid and lived a wild life for a few months. I was working in my Dad's garage at his workbench on a Saturday morning when he came in to tell me he was back with God and going straight. For some reason I was not excited about this and kept cool. He was smoking a cigarette with swagger and that may have annoyed me? Whatever, I replied to him without looking up from

my work by saying:

“I’m interested with what you do with those cigarettes.”

He stood there for a minute then slunk away.

He did go on with the Lord and later he told me that as he left and threw his cigarettes away to never smoke again. The last I heard is that he is a Presbyterian minister in Blenheim and surrounding areas.

I did not teach him with information but in God’s grace I spoke into his life a word that led him to repent and believe.

And another one.

Every few weeks I go off for ‘spiritual supervision’ where I share about my inner life and ministry. It’s both support and accountability. As I listen to what is said in comment and response I hear notes that ring, points that ping! I hear God talking to me words of value. This is a process I am totally aware of and while not sitting at my supervisor’s feet I think I am learning something and pick up points to run with.

The big thing to note is that while the Holy Spirit may be heard in private, Jesus may well disciple us through another of his children, a brother or sister.



Q₆ So what’s my purpose in bringing all this?

A₆ If we really do want to be a church making and growing disciples it’s going to involve individual conversations about our lives and Jesus. That is the setting for training, accountability, encouragement etc.

If we avoid this by only having a church life with corporate or general teaching we may be avoiding the heart of discipleship. Discipleship requires relationship - up close and personal.

This is one reason why Barbara and I are arranging for fellowship meals every two weeks. Around table over a meal is where we talk life. Jesus loved those settings and that is where he spoke about life in God in a way where individuals were engaged.

They were not just informed, or inspired, or given something to think about:

“Nice talk Jesus. Pls come again.”

They were engaged, held accountable, given encouragement, set up to repent and believe.

The best place for this is in the home. We are trying to get close to that in the Hope Centre.

Q₇ Have you ever thought of church being a shared meal in this space here?

That is a way of relating in prime time that churches rarely get to.

If anything, we go to Martha’s way and find things to do as if we are God’s task group on earth. Then when we have things to do we don’t need to stop for searching or challenging conversations.

A symptom of this might be that when we do work together it often becomes tense and less than harmonious. That is an indicator that function is out of proportion to relationship.

So to land on this:

We can be a church of people running around with things to do – the Martha way – distracted from the core business of discipleship within relationships shaped by Jesus.

We can be a church of set-piece offerings that may or may not really say something to people who only get to listen and receive what is offered.

Or we can be a church of conversations about ourselves, our life and God in Jesus Christ.

Barbara and I are wanting to open up a culture change towards that.

Let's talk about our lives and what God is doing.

Let's remember that we need mature people speaking into our lives with insight and have the willingness to grow and 'change'.

Let's believe that God uses others to speak by his spirit in ways that we can recognize as Jesus.

I don't believe we will be advanced as disciples so much by powerful sermons or great worship moments.

I believe that what makes for discipleship is personal engagement involving real conversations where life and God need to meet.

Mary seemed ready for that so she sat at Jesus' feet and let dinner wait. Martha was not yet there.

Where are you?