

Scripture Luke 10: 38-42
(New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰ 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." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Released in the late 1960's, "You Can't Always Get What You Want" is indicative of its time. The main theme is the eternal pursuit for happiness and our unquenchable desire for contentment...

You can't always get what you want
But if you try sometime
You'll find
You get what you need...

The majority of the lyrics paint a somewhat gloomy outlook on life from the perspective of the singer. Nevertheless, the song is famous for concluding on a positive, if not unexpected, note. The Stones do confirm that yes, just as the title states "you can't always get what you want". However, they also declare that if effort is put forth, a person may instead receive what they actually need.

Telling other people what you want is key to feeling alive in a relationship and keeping things vibrant for both people. If only one person is getting their desires met, the relationship suffers. Unfortunately, many people do not get what they want in a relationship. But they could if they knew how to communicate their desires.

This is the crux of the complaint of Martha and the choice made by Mary in today's scripture.

Perhaps another example might help. I once sat with someone who confided in me that they began dating someone. At first, they were in absolute heaven. The other person was so "easy to get along with, About five months later, though, something happened, and the couple had a breakup.

“It just wasn’t working out,” they said. “What happened?” I asked. “In the beginning, it was like a breath of fresh air,” they said. But as time went on, they noticed a couple of things. First, they could never figure out what the other person wanted to do, or where to go, or how they felt about something, and would always defer to me. Even though that felt good in the beginning, over time they were bored with this seeming flexibility. There was something missing, not knowing exactly what it was.

Today, we come to a scripture passage that have occasioned more consternation, at times even hurt, than this short description of Jesus’ visit with two beloved women.

Why the confusion and hurt? Simply because it seems like Jesus favors one of the sisters and chides the other for being worried about the wrong things. Moreover, those “wrong things” have been precisely the things that people have often been charged with in our society and culture – the tasks of hospitality and organization and preparing for guests. So many who have heard this passage over the years have felt like it places them in something of a double bind – first they are told that they are to do “work” and then they hear Jesus say this work is not “the better part.” Confused?

Two or three thoughts come into my mind. We could not get by without our “Marthas.” Neither could our households or society at large. And by Marthas I don’t mean just this one faithful person or even the countless people who have served by sharing their gifts for hospitality, organization, and responsibility. I mean that we could not get by if there were not a multitude of people in our congregation and world who regularly and gladly roll up their sleeves and do the work that meets our needs.

I’ve been told many times that life happens in the interruptions, when we pull out of the regular responsibilities that are both important and consuming, to be caught up in a moment of unexpected joy. I think that’s part of what is going on in this story. Jesus is urging Martha – and, even more, all of us – not to miss those moments where God’s grace bursts through the canopy of our everyday duties to surprise us with the depth of God’s love and the poignancy of God’s mercy.

As with the person that I mentioned at the beginning or with this story from the author of Luke, many people think of “boundaries” only as setting limits, saying no, or trying to stop something destructive from happening. But having good boundaries is more than stopping bad things from happening to us. It is also taking responsibility for the good things we want to happen.

When we take responsibility for our desires and communicate them well, a relationship has much more chemistry, connection, and mutual fulfillment. Doing so, we know about and negotiate any issues; there is give and take. And no one is walking around resentfully.

To have a relationship that works well, we need to communicate our wants not outwardly, but inwardly. In that same way, when we talk with ourselves before we have a “talk” with another person. Here are some of the things we should consider in this process:

- Owning our “want”—be honest about what we want and be aware that our desire is our responsibility.
- Owning the feelings that occur when our desire is not getting met—if we are sad, we need to tell other people, not wait for them to figure it out.
- Choosing to communicate and move toward other people to let our wants be known.
- Communicate desire, not demand. And in conversation, responding, not reacting.

We always have to look at ourselves first, to make sure we are doing our part and asking, ‘Are we making something out of our experience?’ This is particularly true with wants and desires; others do not ***magically know*** what we want, and they need to be told in ways ***they*** can accept. So, the first conversation has to take place inside.

The great jazz musician, Herbie Hancock, sometimes played a chord that was a mistake, and Miles Davis took responsibility to find something that would fit, responding, “We look for the world to be ‘easy for me’ when we need to experience the situation and make something constructive happen with it.”

It may not be the most important story in the world, in the grand scheme of things. And it's not a new story. It certainly won't make tomorrow's headlines. But think of how many people will be hearing this story today –

- Christians all around the world.
- People of all races and nations.
- Young and old.
- Rich and poor.
- Sick and well.
- People like you and me, that might be overwhelmed by the stories in the news these days.

All around the world today, people will be hearing about a Martha, who showed us what it means to have great faith to help express what she needed. So, maybe this story is the most important story in the world today.

This is the one that we can remember, though, when we hear the lyrics of that famous Rolling Stones song:

*You can't always get what you want
You can't always get what you want
You can't always get what you want
But if you try sometime
You'll find
You get what you need...*

Amen.