



## Thought for the Week – 6<sup>th</sup> June 2021

### READING Luke 10:38-42

<sup>38</sup> As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. <sup>39</sup> She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

<sup>41</sup> "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, <sup>42</sup> but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

### SERMON What Jesus says to Frazzled People

Fatigue is one of our most common complaints. Too many people are juggling multiple responsibilities while getting too little sleep and not enough exercise. A recent study has shown that between 10-20% of all crashes in the UK are caused by driver fatigue, and other studies have shown similar figures for workplace accidents and injuries.

The German philosopher Byung-Chul Han has written a book called *The Fatigue Society* (now translated into English as *The Burnout Society*). Interestingly, he suggests that the reason why we so often feel exhausted and fatigued is because we are surrounded by a culture of positivity. He says that things like the Nike slogan "Just do it!" and the publication of thousands of self-help books and articles in magazines are designed to reinforce the imperative of positive thinking and positive actions.

What's wrong with that, doesn't – "Just do it" sound like an empowering slogan indicating our freedom and our limitless potential? But according to Han this is an illusory freedom because the message enclosed within "Just do it" is "you should do it." Writing from a secular perspective, Han says that instead of living in a "disciplinary society" regulated by societal norms, prohibitions and commandments, we now live in an "achievement society" in which we voluntarily succumb to the pressure of achieving and are always striving to do more.

In today's reading from Luke, Jesus met a frazzled woman and talked to her about her condition. Martha lived in the town of Bethany, just outside Jerusalem. How hard-working and caring and practical she was. But Martha had some problems—not one single problem, but five overlapping ones that we can uncover by carefully reading this text.

### When We're Like Martha, We're:

**Distracted.** Verses 39–40 say: "But Martha was distracted with much serving." The Greek word is a compound of two smaller terms, the verb to draw and the word around or away. It is the idea of being pulled in every direction. Martha was pulled in every direction. Most of us can identify with that. We allow ourselves to become too busy, busier than God intends, busier than is necessary, busier than is wise. That's why so many people are tired today.

**Doubting.** In verse 40, Martha said something shocking: *“Lord, do you not care. . . ?”* How often, while being pulled in all directions, do we momentarily doubt God’s caring and concern? She was like the Psalmist who wrote: *“No one cares for my soul”* (Ps. 142:4).

**Self-Pitying.** *“Lord,” said Martha, “do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?”* Of course, Martha did need help. No one denies that. Many hands make light work. The running of a household and the entertaining of guests require that every member of the family do his or her part. But Martha’s agenda didn’t line up with the agenda of Christ. He wasn’t so concerned about the seasoning in the beans, the dust on the floor, or the way the napkins were folded. He was concerned that His life-changing Word get out, that those in the house hear what He had to say. That left poor Martha feeling abandoned in the kitchen where she fell into a grudging mood of irritable self-pity.

**Worrying.** In responding, the Lord pointed out another difficulty: *“Martha, Martha, you are worried. . . ”* Someone said: *“Worry is a small trickle of fear that meanders through the mind until it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.*

**Troubled.** Jesus used the word “troubled” to describe Martha (v. 42). The NIV says, “You are . . . upset about many things.” I have the feeling the “many things” included more than just preparations for a meal. Perhaps Martha was encumbered by many burdens we don’t know about. No wonder we identify with her—pulled in all directions, questioning God’s power and goodness, sinking into self-pity, worried, and upset about many things.

### **When We’re Like Mary**

Jesus’ prescription was a little dose of Mary-ness: *“One thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part.”* Mary was sitting at Jesus’ feet, hearing His word. That implies three things:

**Submission.** The phrase “at his feet” occurs sixteen times in the Bible, and it often implies an attitude of submission and trust. Mary could have sat on the sofa next to Christ, but she had a quiet, trusting, submissive heart, expressed by being at His feet

**Devotion.** See the similar scene in John 12, when this same Mary is at a dinner party, once again sitting at Jesus feet, washing His feet with perfume, and wiping them with her hair.

**Communion.** Mary was listening to His Word. She was having her quiet time, having her Bible study. She was in the prayer closet, feeding on her daily manna. The best way to be fresh and refreshing to others is to learn to sit at the Lord’s feet with an open Bible before us, meeting Him personally each day so He can give us a word for our hearts.

### **Conclusion:**

Of course Martha was distracted. If Jesus were coming to your house, you’d be distracted, too. When he was president of the United States of America, Jimmy Carter, in his travels to various cities, would sometimes stay in someone’s private home. He said that spending the night with a typical American family helped him stay in touch with what was really happening in the nation. He would sit in their living room and talk with them after supper, then sleep in the guest room. It was always a circus, with hundreds of reporters and Secret Service agents and the like, but it wasn’t a bad public relations idea. If the President of the United States or the Queen were coming to spend the night with us, we’d be a nervous wreck trying to get everything ready for them. But what if the most important, the most famous, the most admired man in the history of the human race were coming to your house? Jesus Christ?

Yes, so often we are like Martha and we identify with her, but we can also learn from her to “beware the barrenness of busyness.” The great lesson of this story is that being occupied **with** Christ is more important than being occupied **for** Christ, and it is certainly better than being pre-occupied **with self**.

Are you so busy and upset that you’re neglecting the cultivation of the soul and failing to do that one thing that Jesus was needful of and the most important of all? To focus on him.

## PCI Let’s Pray

Sunday 6 June

### **Moderator**

As our Ministers are encouraged to step back from pastoral duties this week, pray for their spiritual refreshment, through reading, resting and the Refresh Day Conference on Wednesday 9 June. The Refresh Day Conference includes input from the Moderator, Dr Andrew Collins and Mr Jonathan Lamb. Pray for those who come to one of the venue face to face, and for those joining online.

Pray for Ministers for who this past year has been especially demanding. Pray for their encouragement, especially as they think, pray and plan for the incoming church year, especially with so much uncertainty.

Pray for the families of ministers, who quietly carry the weight of responsibility which often comes from living in The Manse. Pray for their encouragement, and for the summer to be a time of refreshment and joy.

### **Being a worshipping people**

Ask God to help us to be a worshipping people, aware of his greatness, always ready to express our adoration, thanks, and praise.

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Monday 7 June

### **Derek and Jane French (global mission workers in Spain)**

Pray for Derek and Jane and their work with Bilbao International Church. Pray for Derek, who is back on a part-time basis, preaching this month and continuing with a sermon series on the gospel of John.

### **Malawi**

Pray for the Student Christian Organisation of Malawi and Scripture Union Malawi as they spread the gospel to children and teenagers in Malawi and seek to disciple young Christians in their Christian faith.

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Tuesday 8 June

### **Eleanor Drysdale (deaconess in Wellington, Ballymena)**

Pray for wisdom as restrictions ease. As pastoral care opens up to face-to-face visits there will be challenges and opportunities. Pray for vision as organisations begin to think through how they will start again, and for leaders and helpers who are finding it daunting.

### **Sligo**

Give thanks for those who have returned to church after lockdown and pray for those who are waiting to return. Pray for wisdom for Rev. David Clarke and the kirk session as they make plans for future ministry.

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Wednesday 9 June

**Chris and Rachel Humphries (global mission workers in Portugal)**

Pray for those in the church plant taking part in the 'The Bible Course' over the coming weeks. Pray that as people come to have a deeper understanding of Scripture, that they too would come to know the One who inspired it.

**Zambia**

Pray for the leadership of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Synod of Zambia as they continue to support their congregations during this time. Pray for the Zambian government as they seek vaccines.

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**Thursday 10 June**

Sam Scott (community outreach worker, Eglinton, Belfast)

Pray for the congregation of Eglinton seeking to fulfil their mission safely and faithfully. Thank God for the leaders in the congregation and pray that they would be energised to face the new challenges in the weeks and months ahead. Pray that they would see fruit for their labour.

**Rathmullan (Co Donegal)**

Pray for Rev. Susan Moore, the kirk session and members of this home mission congregation as they seek opportunities to share God's love with people in the local communities.

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Friday 11 June

**Social Witness**

Pray for all who visit our Homes and Units, whether they be family or friends, ministers or other Health and Social Care Staff. Pray that they will feel welcome, even within the current restrictions. Give thanks for the patience of family and friends as they worked through the restricted visiting. Pray for all professional staff who supported the Homes and Units during these challenging months.

**Education**

As a difficult and different school year comes to an end pray for teachers, principals and support staff as they begin to think about the new term in September. Pray for pupils transitioning into a new educational phase that they would have peace in the midst of uncertainty.

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Saturday 12 June

**General Council**

Please pray for the meetings of the General Council being held as an in-person gathering in the Assembly Hall during this coming week. Pray for both those organizing the logistics, ensuring that Health and Safety mitigations are in place, and those who will be taking part in discussion and decision making.

**Council for Training in Ministry**

The Council is due to meet next Wednesday 16 June at 2pm, for what will be its first full, in-person meeting for some time. Pray for the Council, and its convener, Rev. Nigel McCullough, as it facilitates the work of Union College, training students for the ministry, Accredited Preachers, among other things.