

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

ATTRACTED TO GOD

Luke 10:38-42

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost (Proper 11) Analysis by Bruce T. Martin

Lk 10:38 Now as they went on their way, he [Jesus] entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. 39She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. 40But 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." 41But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; 42there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

DIAGNOSIS: Distracted From God

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Distracted from God by Distractions*

Life imposes itself upon us, "distracting" (v. 40) us by many necessary "tasks" laid upon us in infinite succession. Like Martha in this uniquely Lukan story, we cannot get away from the tasks at hand, including all the "work" (/diakonein/ in Greek, for both "tasks" and "work" in v. 40, normally translated "service") that serves the Lord! Trouble is, for us sinners all these tasks and all our good work serve only to distract us from what our Lord has to offer.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Distracted from God Indeed*

It is one thing to have the necessities of life thrust upon us, even good tasks and good work. Such things are in themselves distractions because they vie for our attention, and we are “distracted” (v. 40). But it is quite another thing to be “distracted” (v. 41) by them, that is, to accept them as though they were not distractions! Martha made ordinary work distracting when she “put herself in her work” (as we say) rather than putting herself at the feet of Jesus. When we invest ourselves in our own deeds, which is inevitable, so that the deeds are in us and begin to define us according to what we do, then they become true distractions, and we are “distracted in-the-deed” (v. 41).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Distracted from God in Deed*

In as much as Martha and all those like her are distracted in their own deeds, which is altogether futile, they/we neglect the “one thing” (v. 42) that is both needful and eternal. God then remains outside our attention, outside our life. To our everlasting shame, all of our own deeds (which we believe define us) will be taken away, leaving us empty indeed.

PROGNOSIS: Attracted To God

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Attracted to God in the Jesus-Deed*

Mary and Martha represent the only two options we have: to stay invested in our own work (which is our inevitable though futile choice) or to be invested in the work of God-in-Christ (which work we sinners are powerless to do, yet may be freed to receive). We are not told why Mary is attracted to the teaching of Jesus, only that she is. As a representative Christ-believer, we must understand Mary’s “choice” (v. 42) as an example of how

our own “work” is always far second to the gospel-word of God acting upon us, freeing us to receive it. At the Lord’s feet, Mary “listened” to him (v. 40), believing in him. Mary became invested in the work of Jesus rather than her own. She listened to and believed in the “one” (v. 42) who alone could make good on his promise (v. 42) BECAUSE the Lord, by his atoning death and resurrected life, continues to serve us with “repentance and the forgiveness of sins” (24:30-33, 44-48).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Attracted to God Indeed*

Such investiture, such believing, such attraction, becomes internalized in us as the deed of Christ, and his continuing life in the Spirit, takes hold of our lives by impelling us towards a future of God’s creating “which will not be taken away” (v. 42) from us. The worries and distractions of our old yet continuing life, its “many things” (v. 41), become secondary as the Spirit draws us ever closer to God’s eternal gift, “the one thing . . . the better part” (v. 42), Jesus the Christ.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Attracted to God in Deeds*

The true work for which we are freed is simply “listening” to the word of God. Believing in God is the only enduring “work” (so-called) for which we were created, that is, our proper “service” to God (/diakonein/). With God’s work in us securely in place, all other work (which by necessity we are actively involved) becomes less worrisome and distracting. True, God is at work in all things, even in our own work (daily tasks and careers). But now we begin to see, with believing eyes, the distinction in all things between what we are doing by necessity (whether from duty or from love) and what God is doing to us and in us (whether to humble us or to save us). By faith in God’s future for us, we are attracted to God in all things and in all deeds. Even in those things and in those deeds that harm us

physically! For such things do in fact prepare the way for a new creation in Christ who already has death behind him.