



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

**Sermon for Pentecost 6**

July 20, 2025

## Jesus Our Host

### Luke 10:38–42

<sup>38</sup> Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. <sup>39</sup> And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. <sup>40</sup> But 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." <sup>41</sup> But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, <sup>42</sup> but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

"Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest . . ." Have you ever wondered about that? While our common table prayer is fine, has it ever occurred to you that there's something odd about inviting God to be our guest? Even within the prayer itself, we acknowledge that it's the Lord who hosts our meals: "and let THY gifts to us be blest." The Catechism teaches us to quote Psalm 145 before our meals: "The eyes of all look to You, O Lord, and You give them their food at the proper time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing." From God – to us. We the guests, and He the host. That is generally the image we're given in the Scriptures, and it's the image we're given in today's Gospel.

Come, Lord Jesus, be our *Host*. That could be the summary of Luke's account of Jesus' visit to the house of Mary and Martha. These two sisters were certainly acquainted with the rules of hospitality – that one was under obligation to provide a meal and drink and even lodging for a visitor. Abraham showed himself to be such a hospitable host when the Lord came walking up while he was sitting by the oaks of Mamre (Gen. 18), and Martha was no less inclined to do that for her Lord. As the Priest and Levite in the parable about the Good Samaritan were both concerned about fulfilling God's law of ritual purity, so was Martha concerned about providing for her Lord. But Mary showed a different kind of hospitality to Jesus; a hospitality of honor and attention. While Martha busily prepared to host the Savior, Mary set about to be His *guest*. Martha wanted to *provide*, but Mary wanted to *receive*! Was that rude?

Which was actually the greater form of hospitality? To serve as host, or to recognize that in the Savior's presence, WE become HIS guests? Martha had chosen the former, but Mary chose the latter, and Jesus said: "It won't be taken from her." That's such a hard thing for us busy, proud, and independent people to understand. We don't like to be the objects of someone else's service. We don't care to be the purely passive recipients of what another person has to give. And we're not alone. Peter wasn't really all that



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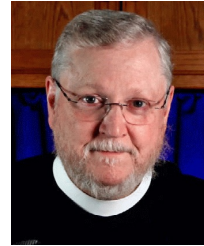
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comfortable with Jesus bending down to wash His feet, if you recall. And doubtless, many more identify with being Good Samaritans to those in need than in being those who need a Good Samaritan. Simply put, we'd rather be the server than the served. We'd rather be the giver than the one receiving. But when it comes to Jesus, it's necessary that we first be Mary, for only when we've been served, will we have anything to give.

Being served is the true nature of the Church. Sure, we come together here to sing Christ's praise, to join our voices with the angels and the saints in heaven, praising Christ and glorifying God, our Savior. But Jesus does not draw us near so that we may give to *Him*; He wants to give to *us*! Certainly, He gladly hears our prayers, our praise, our worship, and they are truly a sweet smelling sacrifice, filling Jesus' holy temple like a cloud of incense. But Christian worship is acceptable to God because our God has first accepted us in Christ. He has made us Holy in Jesus' blood. Remember, the priests of old could never come into God's temple until they'd first been purified by blood. So also, Jesus serves us first by cleansing us of sin so that we may then be servants. First, we must receive; and then, we give. At its most basic level, our worship is receiving. It's the highest form of hospitality by which we recognize that Jesus Christ is Host, and we, His guests of honor.

Before the Church can be Martha, she must first be Mary . . . sitting at the Savior's feet and being served Christ's cool, refreshing Gospel; served with a hearty helping of the Bread of Life, God's Word-Made-Flesh for our forgiveness. This is what we call the Divine Service. *Divine*, because it's God who is doing it. And *Service*, because our Lord is doing something for His people. What a difference it would make if Christians understood this better! Could you imagine waking up on Sunday, thinking to yourself: "Nah, I don't think I want the Lord to serve me today; I'd rather serve myself by catching up on things around the house"? Could you imagine thinking: "I don't really want or need the service of my Savior"? I doubt many Christians even recognize that in essence that's what they're saying by their absence from the Service of God's house, because they think of worship as something *THEY* do; as a duty or obligation; as a habit or responsibility. They think: "I don't feel like going to church this morning," the way they may not feel like going to work on Monday. They simply don't grasp that Christ is waiting here to serve *them* in His Word and Sacrament; that Christ is here to treat them as His honored guest. Oh, if only they could see the Lord the way that Mary did! If only they could lift their eyes from all they have to do, and see how much the Lord is doing!

It's a high, exalted thing to sit where Mary sits, and a poor and lowly thing to be where Martha is. Jesus says as much this morning: "Mary has chosen what is better." You see, Jesus told the Twelve, the night of His betrayal, when He gave His flesh and blood to them in the bread and wine: "Which is the greater? He who sits at table, or He who serves? But I am among you as one who serves." When you go out to a 5-star restaurant, is the one who fills your glass and brings your food superior to you? Or are you, the one your waiter



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waits upon, the greater? Certainly, the person who's being waited on is greater. And so are you when Jesus waits upon you nail-scarred hand and nail-pierced foot. He lowers Himself to Martha's place and scrambles to prepare your Meal. He empties Himself of life itself that you may eat and drink your fill! You are the honored guest! He is your humble servant! He does all the work, and you receive His service!

That is what once happened for you on a cross, and it's what is happening today. You come, and Jesus serves you. He washes you with His forgiveness. He feeds you with His Word, and caters to your every need. There isn't any more exalted place than Mary's. It certainly is NOT the place of Martha, busying herself in preparation, scrambling to get the food on the table. That's the posture of a servant, but you are here as honored guests. The place Martha has chosen really belongs to Christ, and Mary cannot help her. That would be to abdicate her place of honor, and to overthrow the Savior. For when Jesus comes to do you honor, faith receives it gladly, but pride insists we lend a hand. Pride demands a part to play and claims that all the honor is in the doing, not the receiving from the Lord. What a strange reversal of the Savior's ordering of things when people make what pastors do the most important, and clamor for a piece of where the action really is! What an oddity that guests of honor think it more exalted to participate in the serving! Could you imagine rising to your feet at your own wedding reception to grab the tray out of your waiter's hand, insisting that he sit while you perform his duties? The image seems a bit extreme, but so was Martha's lamentation when she pleaded: "Make her rise and help me; make her leave her seat of honor and give me a hand."

Jesus does not want you doing for yourself today; He wants to do for you! He's provided you a servant to bring you His forgiveness by the proclamation of His Word. Christ Himself is here to serve you with life and peace. Here, your Savior treats you like the kings and queens you are. There will be plenty of time for each of you to be the Savior's Martha – His instruments for bringing His love and service to the world. You can't only be Mary. Martha has her place as well. Wherever God has given you a neighbor, there you find your table, your kitchen, your place for giving out what God has given here. With His benediction coming later, Jesus Christ will lift you to your feet, and send you out as Martha, humbling yourself in service to your neighbor as Christ Himself has served you here. *Then* you will be the host, but *now* you are the guest. Let the Lord serve as He desires. Come, Lord Jesus, be our Host. In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen