

Sermon Podcast 2-16.MP3

0:10

Pastor Will has been doing a sermon series the past several weeks about the sacred art of asking questions. Our deepest and most troubling questions can be great questions to ask, especially in church. Will helped us find in scripture answers to questions like, who am I? What am I doing here? Why do we suffer?

0:34

Where is God when we suffer? We've asked, who do you think Jesus really is? And is God angry with us? And so we come to today's question. When Will was planning this series, he chose the title you're gonna see on screen in just a moment.

0:53

Don't you care that my sister left me to do all the work? Now that's a question from the Bible story we're gonna be looking at in a few moments. When Will asked me to fill in for him today, I thought, that question is pretty specific, being about somebody's sister and all. But you can probably guess where that title is going, if you've ever worked with people, a sister, a brother, fellow students on a team project, coworkers, children, even a spouse, you can probably relate to the dynamics of this story. This story is recorded in a book of the Bible called the gospel of Luke.

1:34

We'll read chapter 10, verses 38 through 42. I'd like us to read all together aloud this passage. Are you ready? Let's read. Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home.

1:58

She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks. So she came to him and asked, Lord, do you not care that my sister Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted about many things. There is need of only one thing, Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.

Martha had invited Jesus, the famous teacher, into her home.

2:42

That meant that she needed to provide the expected Middle Eastern hospitality for this special guest, and that included preparing at least one meal. And it was expected that the women of the household would make those preparations. Martha was not the only woman in the household. Her sister Mary was there too, but Mary chose not to help in the kitchen. Instead, she sat down at the feet of the teacher and began listening to what he had to say.

3:13

As twenty first century outsiders looking in on this scene, it may look to each of us like these sisters, each of them is doing a good thing. One of them is providing food and comfort for their guest. The other is showing interest in what their guest has to say. He is a teacher after all. What makes the story interesting is how Martha reacts to her sister's behavior and how Jesus responds to both of them.

3:42

The author of this book in the bible, Luke, gives us other stories like this. He also wrote the book of Acts. And in both books, he tells the story of Jesus through episodes like this one. Someone does something good, but they upset other people's expectations. For example, they help someone who is despised by their community, or they violate religious regulations by the way they help, when they help, where they help.

4:17

And sometimes they're confronted with the question, who are you to help? What authority do you have to do this thing? All the events of Jesus' life took place in Israel Two Thousand Years ago, and everyone in that time and place would have heard today's story, and they would have expected two things. One, that Mary really should have been helping her sister in the kitchen. The second thing they'd notice is that Mary should not have been sitting listening to their guest, the teacher.

4:52

Women were not deemed worthy of instruction. Only men and boys receive formal education. People would have thought Mary presumptuous to be taking up this good teacher's precious time for herself. So Martha, the diligent hostess, surely felt justified in how she handled the situation. The way her question is worded in the original Greek makes it clear she expected that Jesus would agree with her.

5:22

Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me. Mary just sits there quietly. She doesn't say a word. Notice Jesus' reply.

5:40

He calls Martha's name twice. Martha, Martha. I hear it as a calm voice, tender, the voice a good friend uses when you're when they're trying to gently direct your redirect your thinking, let your emotions cool, prepare you to consider your sit your your situation in a different way. Maybe to help you consider that what you think has to be done your way, well maybe there's another good option. Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things.

6:23

And then Jesus said, there's need of only one thing, Mary has chosen the better part, the better part, which will not be taken away from her. Those cultural expectations Mary was violating, Jesus challenges both of them. He's saying that Mary, a woman, is worthy of sitting with him and learning from him. In other parts of the story of Jesus, we see him including women in his teaching and his ministry. Jesus makes it clear that his message is open to everyone.

7:01

Jesus also challenges the idea that traditions, cultural expectations should always be followed. He doesn't tell Martha that taking care of her hosting task is wrong. He says what's wrong is that she's worried and distracted by all those things. She's lost track of the most important thing that's happening in her house that time. And her worry and distraction had spilled over onto Mary and onto Jesus too.

7:34

I wonder if Luke left out an interesting part of this story. The part when Jesus said, Martha, come sit with us. After a while, we'll all go to the kitchen and make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Jesus may not have said that, but he did say, Martha, there's need of only one thing. Mary's chosen the better part, and I won't take that away from her.

8:03

Mary has chosen not to be worried and distracted. She's chose something better. In fact, it's the only thing both of you, Martha, Mary, need. We're going to talk about what that better part is in a moment, but let's pause here and ask ourselves how and when, with our own worries and distractions, do we deprive ourselves and others of that better part? Do we do it when we over schedule our days with things that our culture expects us to do?

8:42

Do we overschedule our children's days like that? Do we let the expectations of others override our time with Jesus? The expectations of family, of our peers, and neighbors, of our work, the messages of media, and public authorities, even our church activities. Do we get so worried and distracted by those things that we don't make time to listen to the one who made us, to the one who knows us best, to the one who loves us best. There's need of only one thing Jesus said, and Mary has chosen the better part.

9:24

What is that one thing? What is the better part? The better part clearly involved Mary sitting and listening to Jesus talk. We don't know the words Mary was hearing and contemplating as she sat at his feet, but we know things Jesus said at other times. We know that crowds of people will come from all over to hear what he had to say.

9:47

There was one time that Jesus sat on the side of a hill and taught a large group of people crowded around him. He took that opportunity to say some important things. Those things he said

there have come to be called the Sermon on the Mount. Pastor Will has said that the words Jesus said on that occasion are the wisest teaching in history. Many of people agree with that.

10:15

I'm one of them. Let's be like Mary for a few minutes here. Let's sit at Jesus' feet for a few moments now. And let's listen to some of what he told the crowd that day. His words are recorded in a book of the bible called Matthew.

10:35

We'll read from chapter five. And again, I'd like us all to read these words aloud together. The bible says that we, the church, Jesus followers, we are the body of Christ. We are the voice of Christ. Do you think that as we join our voices in reading Jesus' words aloud together, we can hear Jesus speaking to us.

11:01

Let's read verse three together. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Before we go any further, let's talk about that first word, blessed. We're gonna see the word a lot this morning. Some modern translations of the Bible use the word happy.

11:21

In our story today, Martha would have been happy if her sister had helped her in the kitchen instead of sitting in the living room. For Martha, getting something accomplished would make her happy. For me, maybe for you, getting something accomplished makes us happy. These days, we often think that happiness means having fun. If we want children to be happy, we make sure they have something fun to do.

11:48

If I'm not feeling particularly happy, I'll look for something fun to do, something entertaining. But feeling good, being happy will come and go as my circumstances change. Something good happens, I'm happy. Something not good happens, I'm not happy. I'm up and down, back and forth.

12:12

That's not the kind of happy this word blessed means. For people

two thousand years ago, when the bible was written, happiness was something you could possess in your soul. And once you had that happiness, that sense of being blessed, it was something that endured. It could not be easily taken away. Martha was not going to be that kind of happy just by getting dinner on the table on time.

12:43

We're not going to be that kind of happy just by meeting our deadlines and checking things off our list, or even by doing something fun. So what is Jesus going to tell us about being happy, about being blessed? What might he have been telling Martha's sister Mary as she sat at his feet listening? We're going to look briefly at some of these short but powerful sentences that Jesus gave us. These sentences from the Sermon on the Mount are called the Beatitudes.

13:15

That word Beatitude comes from the comes from the Latin word beatus, which means blessed or happy, because that's the first word of each sentence. It take a whole sermon to begin to explore each one of these beatitudes. We're only gonna get an appetizer taste of a few of them today. Here's the first one, verse three. We read it a minute ago.

13:43

Let's read it together again. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Poor in spirit, poverty of spirit. We're poor in spirit when we understand, when we feel deep inside, that there is a deeper life, a fuller life that we urgently need to be part of. We come to realize that we can have money or power or material things and still feel that poverty of spirit.

14:15

Money and power and things can actually distract us from a deeper, better way of living. If we're materially rich, we may not realize we need God. We may think we don't need anyone. But if we're poor, we know we have to depend on God. We know we have to depend on other people.

14:40

If we're rich, we may not be able to tell the difference between necessities and luxuries. If we're poor, we know the difference, and we're grateful if we have the necessities. If we're rich and someone speaks the good news of Jesus to us, we may receive it like a threat or a scolding. Lots of rich people and powerful people in Jesus day felt threatened by what Jesus had to say. Some powerful people today take Jesus words like a threat or a scolding.

15:12

But if we're poor, the news of Jesus really does sound like good news to us. If we're rich and Jesus calls us to follow him, we think about all we'll have to give up. It gets complicated to think of leaving so much behind. But if we're poor, we can follow more easily because we have so little to lose. We can be ready for anything.

15:41

Jesus says, if you're poor in spirit, happiness is yours because you are prepared to live with God. You're ready to become what he created you to be. You don't have to struggle under the burden of wealth or worries about security. You have plenty of space to receive all God's kingdom has to offer. You think it would have helped Martha to listen to Jesus talk about that?

16:08

Would we be better choosing the better part if we devote some time learning what Jesus means by being poor in spirit and what he means when he says theirs is the kingdom of heaven? Let's read verse four together. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Six years ago, late one Friday night, my cousin texted me with a phone number. I called the number.

16:39

It was my sister's next door neighbor in Charlotte. She told me that earlier that evening, my sister had collapsed in her driveway. She was rushed to the hospital and she had died there. It was completely unexpected news, unbelievably horrible news. Sharon was my only sibling.

16:59

She was divorced and had no children, so it was up to me to quickly prepare a funeral for which no plans had been made. A mother up in our hometown in Tennessee handled the burial arrangements, and I had to handle all the end of life necessities, do legal stuff, pay the bills, empty out a house. I'd wanted to share some words at my sister's funeral. But from the moment I heard about her death, I was so busy, I didn't have time to put thoughts together. We'd already arranged for my cousin's husband to bring a message, but I wanted to say something too.

17:34

So at 10:00 the night before the funeral, I sat in my mother's house, the house where Sharon and I grew up together, and I began to make some notes. But I was so tired, I couldn't finish what I wanted to say, so I didn't speak during the funeral. It was on the drive home the next day that it came to me, the message I wish I could have brought. And alone in the car, I preached it, and it was good. I wish you could have heard it.

18:08

I preached to the world about two words, death and anticipation. About how God had created us all for such goodness, but early on, we messed it up by our selfish choices, and we brought death into the world. I preached about how God in his great mercy sent his son Jesus to be one of us and Jesus took on death and defeated it. He was killed then God raised him from the dead for our sake. Jesus died and in some incomprehensible way, he included us in his death so that we could also be included in his life of resurrection.

18:54

Because of what we can know life Because of that, we can know life on the other side of death. And we can know it now. We can live life as if we are already on the other side of death. Because of that, we may be in mourning now, but we have the comfort of knowing life beyond death. We have the comfort of knowing that life beyond death is far greater than all the losses, all the griefs we endure here.

19:29

And knowing that brings us comfort now, even as we mourn our

loss today and tomorrow. Let's read verse four again. Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. Right there in my car, in the middle of my grief and mourning, I knew Jesus was with me, and I knew the hope my sister and I both had in him for life after death, and I was comforted. In our busy schedules, would we be choosing the better part if we devote some time letting Jesus teach us about receiving his comfort, the promise of new life when we're in mourning, and so that we can comfort others too.

20:26

Let's read verse five together. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Those words are actually from a poem, a song, written hundreds of years before Jesus' time. That song is in the Hebrew scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, in Psalm 37. Many of the people of the Bible lived in the land of Palestine.

20:51

Jesus lived there, and in that time, rich and powerful landlords owned most of the land. They often took the land by violence, and they oppressed the people who lived there. And that old song, Psalm 37, and Jesus Himself, were saying that when God deals with the injustice of the rich and powerful of that day and of today, And when God takes away from them all that they claim as their own, it will be the people who had no power, the meek, the humble, who end up inheriting the land. God will give it to those who, in their humility, are eager to learn the ways of God. In a day when rich and powerful people are running the world, and you feel like you're at the mercy of forces beyond your influence or control, would we be choosing the better part if we devote some time letting Jesus teach us about who really owns the world and everything in it?

21:58

And what kind of people will inherit the goodness of the world as God brings his new creation? Finally, let's read verse seven aloud together. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. The world in Jesus' day could be harsh. Our everyday world can be harsh too.

22:29

From social media to politics, our society wants us to take delight in the demeaning and suffering of others. Those whose beliefs and behavior and even appearance make us afraid or angry, even those who just disagree with us. But Jesus says it's the merciful who are blessed. The bible says mercy is in God's very nature. The root of the Hebrew word for mercy refers to the womb.

23:00

To have mercy is to have the feeling for another person that a mother has for her own child. But it's more than a feeling. It means getting invested and involved for the sake of someone who is suffering. They may be suffering because of harm that was done to them. They may be suffering the consequences of their own wrong actions.

23:23

Either way, merciful people see the person beneath the problem. Like Jesus, they are moved with compassion toward people who have lost their way, and they move to help bring restoration and life. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. In these harsh days, would we be choosing the better part if we devote some time letting Jesus teach us about how merciful God is to us, to me, to you every day. Would we be choosing the better part if we resist the ways of the world, the harsh ways of the world, and become more merciful to others ourselves.

24:20

That's all the good appetizers of Jesus wisdom we have time to taste this morning. We remember Martha's request. Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me. And we hear Jesus' response.

24:39

Martha, Philip, insert your name here. You are worried and distracted by many things. What you really need is what only I can teach you. Come spend time with me. Let me tell you about the people who really are happy, what they're like, what they do.

25:05

Let me show you the people who will be ready to live in the new creation that I'm bringing into the world. I want you to be one of

them. We're gonna sing one more song. I'd be here if you'd like to come talk about following Jesus, how to be part of his new creation, or how to become part of this community of Jesus followers. Will you pray with me?

25:38

God, you sent your son, Jesus, to the world because you love us. He didn't come to condemn us as we deserved, but to save us. He brought comfort to the grieving. He showed us by his life the power of humility and the power of mercy. He showed us what it looked like to be righteous and just.

26:00

He showed us how to make peace. Jesus, we ask your spirit to fill us with the desire to learn these things from you, so we will really know what it means to be happy and blessed for our sake, and for the world. Amen.