Rev. Janet R. Doyle

Elmer Presbyterian Church

25th Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday, November 15, 2026

Scripture: Luke 10: 38-42

Sermon: Gratitude Over Grumbling

There are only 41 more shopping days until Christmas as of today! The weeks between Thanksgiving and New Years Day have become a frantic, anxiety filled dash through the holidays. It all happens so fast that we hardly remember any of it!

I don't want to alarm you, but do you realize how much we have to do in the next few weeks getting ready for Thanksgiving in a little over a week?

We need to buy the food, clean the house, prepare the food, make the pies, and make the cranberry sauce. Then on Thanksgiving Day we need to cook the turkey and prepare all the other traditional food of the holiday.

Then we have to put the Thanksgiving and Fall decorations away and find the Christmas decorations. I love the job of untangling the Christmas lights and wondering why half of them are burned out even though they didn't do anything but sit in the dark for the last 12 months.

We also have to buy the gifts for our family, attend Christmas parties, bake cookies for our neighbors, and Christmas breads and don't forget to buy and address the Christmas cards.

This is the season of abundance. The season of a lot. Where there is…a lot of activity, a lot of family, a lot of shopping, a lot of food, a lot of expectations and a lot of pressure and a lot of stress.

Don't forget the grief of the holiday season when you are overwhelmed with missing loved ones who have died or people who are no longer in your life. The holidays aren't always filled with joy for some people.

On top of it we feel the pressure to do it all with the patience and generosity of Mother Theresa and the social perfection of Martha Stewart.

But while there is still time, before we get swept up into the fury of the holidays, we need to take some steps to ensure we get through the season with our sanity intact. To do that we are going to learn from a woman named Martha and her sister, Mary from our scripture lesson today.

You think hosting your in-laws over the holidays is a lot of pressure? What do you think it would be like having the Son of God over for dinner?

Martha had the chance to host God in her home. She had a unique opportunity to create a special memory that she could have cherished in her heart for the rest of her days. This should have been a happy moment, but in the end it became a day of worry and anxiety

We can identify with Martha, especially if you are a Martha in life. This is the season where we, like Martha, have the opportunity to create a warm lasting memory. But if we aren't careful the only thing we will end up with is a bleeding ulcer and stress and the holiday frown. If we aren't careful, holiday stress and grumbling can ruin our holiday fun with family and friends.

If you don't have an attitude of gratitude then stress and anxiety will turn into stress and grumbling and in the end you will regret having a bad attitude.

Jesus said, "You are worried and upset about many things" in v.41.

Mayo Clinic said 80-85% of its total caseload was the result of anxiety and worry. Another article quoted a doctor saying 70% of all medical patients could cure themselves if they could stop worrying. 112 million Americans take medicine for stress related symptoms. Stress has been shown to cause high blood pressure, ulcers, headaches, muscle pain, and heart problems.

If we are going to do any physical harm to ourselves this season let's do it by overeating and not overreacting.

Martha is slicing and dicing, she is cooking and cleaning. She is consumed by all the things she is doing and overwhelmed by all the things she still needs to do. She turns to ask Mary a question and she realizes that she is all alone in the kitchen.

Looking through the doorway she can see her sister sitting there in the living with everyone else, while she worked alone in the kitchen

Even though she is in a house full of people whom she loves and who love her she suddenly feels very alone. Martha is feeling abandoned and taken advantage of and this has caused their relationship to be strained. And then she just feels angry.

Sound familiar? And you can hear it in her words.

"…my sister has left me…" v. 40

Were you aware that stress also affects our vision?

It prevents us from seeing anything other than ourselves and our situation. To some degree we all know what she is feeling.

There have been times when we have all felt as if we are the only ones doing all the work, and that no one seemed to notice our work and sacrifice. We end up feeling unappreciated and alone.

It is ironic that we look forward to the Holidays because they have the power to draw us together. It is a time when we should be reconnecting with those we know and love. But just like Martha and Mary stress can strain the best relationships and sour the warmest fellowships.

I can see Mary and the rest of the disciples are sitting around the Lord feasting on his word. Martha comes marching in with a ladle in her hand. Her apron is filthy, her hair is a mess.

"Tell my sister to get up and come help me!" The room goes silent.

If you are going to make a memory this holiday season, just make sure it's a good memory. If the responsibilities make us difficult to live with then there is something wrong with how we are dealing with the stress of the season.

"Lord, don't you care…?" v. 40

This sounds like a question, but it really is more of an accusation.

The worry of the moment has not only driven a wedge between her and Mary, but it has even caused her to question the Lord's care for her.

Lord don't you know what I am going through?

Lord don't you care……that I am the only one working? That no one is helping me? That this isn't fair? I am doing this all for you and don't you care?

If we are not careful we can begin to resent the ones we really love.

Some believe that stress is caused when we try to do it all.

But the truth is stress occurs when we try to do anything without the Lord giving us His Peace.

What steps can we take to make sure this holiday season is one filled with gratitude over grumbling?

Know Your Limits"…Martha opened her home to him." v. 38

Jesus did not invite himself in. Jesus did not ask for a big elaborate meal. Martha's anxiety is the product of her own choices. We have to know our physical limits.

Thanks to our society and maybe Martha Stewart, we feel the pressure to create the perfect holiday experience for our families and our guests. You know what I mean. Where the turkey is juicy, the cranberry sauce isn't shaped like a can, every gift brings tears to their eyes.

We try to live up to the unrealistic expectations that we have built up in our mind. So we overextend ourselves, over commit ourselves and over work ourselves.

We have to know our financial limits. The only evidence of the holidays we have is a statement from the credit card company telling us that for the next 9 months we are paying an annual percentage rate of 21%.

Choose What's Better…my sister has left me to do the work… v. 40

When we read this we assume that Mary did nothing to help with the preparation for the meal. But Martha implies that at some time Mary was helping her, but she left Martha in the kitchen to sit at the feet of Jesus.

I can see Mary in the kitchen working right alongside Martha when, suddenly, she comes to her senses. And she realizes…

"God is sitting in the living room and I am peeling potatoes!"

So she put down the peeler and sat down with the savior.

Martha on the other hand was so consumed with what she had to do that she seemed to forget WHO she was doing it for.

That is what happens in our society. We forget what is important in life.

The activity of the holidays has become so frantic that we seem to have forgotten WHO we should really be celebrating and thanking for all we have in our lives.

Mary recognized the significance of the moment and that it was not determined by what was served or by the gifts being given, but by who was there.

Jesus has a way of helping us keep things in perspective.

It is funny how the things that were once so important instantly become irrelevant when Jesus steps into our lives and sets our priorities straight.

Martha complains and grumbles "…my sister has left me to do the work". (v. 40)

Jesus explained to all there, "Mary has chosen what is better." (v. 42)

Mary had a choice to make. Her choice was not between what was bad or good. She had to choose between what was good and what was better. Mary chose what was better.

How do we know the difference? “Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken from her.” (v. 42)

What Martha was doing was essential for eating, but what Mary was doing was eternal.

I read an article called “Host Without Grumbling” about this story of Martha and Mary by Christina Fox in Christian Living (January 16, 2013). She wrote, “ Martha was focused so much on the details that she missed the reason why she was hosting guests — so that they might learn from Jesus. If scrubbing and cleaning becomes our focus, we might miss sharing the mess and dirtiness of our lives with others. If our greatest concern is wondering how a group of people will fit in our home, we’ll miss the opportunity to make room in our hearts for people. If we worry about making the perfect meal to serve, we’ll miss sharing with our guests the only food that satisfies.

Hospitality is an act of service that helps us share the love of Christ with others. God calls each of us to practice hospitality, whether it comes easy or not. And for those of us who hesitate for one reason or another, it becomes an act of obedience to our Savior who has opened his own home for us through his shed blood on the cross. How can we do any less than open our own hearts and homes to others?”

This holiday season lets us keep our eyes on Jesus and have hearts full of gratitude over grumbling so that we can have His Peace and share His love with others.