

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Jesus and Mary and Martha*

SERIES: *Jesus and Women*

SCRIPTURES: *Luke 10*

SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*

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**Credit to Ken Bailey (Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes); John Ortberg (God is Closer than you Think); Bruxy Cavey;*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you in this room and to those of you gathered on-line, at home, tuning in to the live stream.

If you have a Bible turn with me to **Luke 10**. By the way, if you need a Bible there are guest Bible's out in the foyer and you are more than welcome to pick one up.

One of the more striking aspects of the Gospel stories are the many interactions Jesus had with marginalized groups in the ancient world.

For example in Mark 1, Jesus touches **a leper**. In so doing Jesus was breaking the Levitical law (Lev 5:3)...religious rules.

Luke (19) tell us of a time when Jesus ate in the home of, Zacchaeus, **a tax collector**. Eating with folks of that ilk would likely have made Jesus unclean. No Rabbi would do that.

Matthew (8) tells about **a Roman centurion** coming and asking Jesus to heal his servant who is dying. I mean you think about that for a moment. The Romans occupied and bullied the Jews. This would be the same group of people who would eventually hang Jesus on a cross. Jesus agrees, heals the servant and then commends the Roman soldier for his great faith.

One of Jesus most well-known stories is called the **Good Samaritan**. And that may not stand out to us today, but for a Jewish rabbi in the first century to say “good Samaritan” was an oxymoron. Most people thought those two words don’t go together.

Well, in first century Middle East, there was another group of marginalized individuals that keeps showing up in the stories about Jesus. One of the more outstanding features of the Gospel stories is Jesus interactions with and inclusion of **women**.

Jesus was including women in his community in a way they had never been included before.

The Apostle Paul reflecting on the significance of Jesus life and teachings wrote, **“There is no longer Jew or Greek** (see Jesus breaking down the racial barriers), **slave or free** (Jesus is breaking economic/class barriers), and then Paul add another...**male or female...for all are one in Christ Jesus.**”

This morning we are starting a series called Jesus and women (**series graphic**). And so, we are gonna spend the next 5 weeks looking at several of the encounters Jesus had with women, and these are some of my favorite stories in all of the Bible.

Now just kind of set the stage for us, I know that in some ways, it’s hard in modern North America to understand the significance of what Jesus was doing. And so to help you more fully appreciate the significance of Jesus inclusion of women...I’m just gonna read some quotes for you...coming from around the time of Jesus to just a few centuries after Jesus, from some well-known church leaders and theologians. And we’ll see if I can make it out alive after I read these statements to you.

Ben Sira Jewish scholar living (100-200 BCE) – **From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die.**

Clement of Alexandria (2nd Century) **“Every woman should be filled with shame by the thought that she is a woman.”**

Tertullian (2nd Century) **“Women are the devil’s gateway.”**

Chrysostem (4th & 5th Century) **“God maintained the order of each sex by dividing the business of life into two parts, and assigned the more necessary and beneficial aspects to the man and the less important, inferior matter to the woman.”**

Augustine (4th & 5th Century) **“The woman together with her own husband is the image of God, but when she is referred separately, which regards the woman herself alone, then she is not the image of God.”**

Mother’s Day is next week, I wouldn’t recommend including any of these statements in your card. We might call these statements the residue or perhaps more accurately the stench hanging around, related to views of women, in the early centuries of the church. And while we have come a long way...I suspect that there is still much we have to learn.

Even some of our modern day phrases give us hints that we still have some learning to do...

“Can’t live with ‘em, can’t live without ‘em.”

Happy wife, happy life.

Men are from Mars, women are from Venus.

Dallas Willard writes that...**“...to heal the open sore of social existence, there is no doubt we must start... with *how men and women are together in our world.***

If that relationship is wrong in its many dimensions, all who come through it will be seriously damaged.” (Willard Renovation 193).

Part of what we'll do through this series is get a taste of the “radically inclusive nature of Jesus community” and the way he was elevating women in a way never seen before. And then in a more general sense, there are some really important concepts about following Jesus in these stories.

So here we go, this morning we begin with Luke 10 -

I. Jesus and Mary and Martha

Luke 10:38-42 - ³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ 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!”

⁴¹ “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one.^[1] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

First, notice,

A. Jesus forbidden action...

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

In the ancient Middle East, there were no Motel 6's or Shalom Inns. Travelers were dependent upon the hospitality of private homeowners. The implication here, is that, Martha was offering for Jesus (and his disciples) to spend the night. Amazingly, Jesus agrees. He is willing to stay overnight at the home of what appears to be an unmarried woman and her unmarried sister.

This may not seem like a big deal to many of us. But in the ancient world a rabbi would never do such a thing because it would have been viewed as forbidden...“scandalous...”

“Such activity was (and is) unheard of in the socially conservative Middle East. Today, if university students anywhere in the region travel to a seminar, a play or a picnic, the girls must be taken home for the night or housed with relatives.”

The Mishnah (rabbinic teachings about the Jewish Law) **reads: Let thy house be opened wide and let the needy be members of thy household; and talk not much with womankind. They said this of a man's own wife: how much more of his fellow's wife!** (M. Aboth, 1.5, Danby 446). (Ken Bailey)

In other words, men...keep your distance from women. Especially women you're not married to.

I went to Messiah College and at Messiah, as well as many other private Christian colleges...they have something called “**visiting hours.**” The guys dorms and the girls dorms are on different floors. And the rule is, guys are not allowed onto girls floors and vice versa...it is forbidden. The only exception is during “visiting hours.” For a few hours over the weekend, guys may visit girls dorms. Breaking visiting hours is kind of a scandalous thing on Christian campuses.

Culturally speaking, there is a sense, a feeling in the story that what Jesus is doing is breaking visiting hours.

The scandalous nature of the story is compounded by

B. Mary's forbidden action...

³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

And this really is the crux of this story...the punchline, if you will. This is not intended as a literal description of Mary's location in the room and proximity to Jesus...though that may well have been the case.

We talked a little bit about this concept last year...to sit at a rabbi's feet was an expression in the ancient world to indicate the relationship between a rabbi and a disciple.

Recall this quote from the Mishna (Avot 1:4)

**Let thy house be a meeting-house for the wise;
and powder thyself in the dust of their feet;
and drink their words with thirstiness.**

There's even another example of this expression in your Bible. Flip to **Acts 22**, the Apostle Paul is giving his credentials to a group of Jews about his legitimacy as a Jewish leader and expert in the law and one of the things he says is, "**I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors.**"

The Greek phrase here literally says, "**para tous podos**"...which may not mean much to you, it's Greek to me also. But look closer. Do you see the word **podos**? Gives you hints about the literal meaning of the Greek. Like in our world, what is a

podiatrist? Foot doctor. Literally Paul is saying “I sat at the feet of Gamaliel” which means I was trained by, studied with Gamaliel. I was his disciple.

To sit at the feet of...means to be a disciple. Mary is listening, as a disciple, at the feet of Jesus. This may not hit you as outrageous, shocking or scandalous...but first I would ask you to recall some of the statements related to women in the ancient world that we read earlier. Second let me finish the quote I read just a few mins ago from the Mishnah.

Let thy house be opened wide and let the needy be members of thy household; and talk not much with womankind. They said this of a man’s own wife: how much more of his fellow’s wife!...

...Hence the Sages have said: He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the Law and at the last will inherit Gehenna (M. Aboth, 1.5, Danby 446). (Ken Bailey)

Gehenna being one of the words sometimes translated as hell. So, there you have it, all you moms out there with teenage boys, according to ancient rabbi’s talking to girls could send you to hell!

And here sits Mary, likely sitting among a group of young men, doing what was culturally inappropriate, forbidden...she was listening as a disciple of Jesus.

Martha is frustrated at what is happening.

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!”

Two things to point out here:

First of all, suppose you are emptying the dishwasher. Your spouse or roommate is sitting on the couch, watching tv or scrolling through their phone doing nothing. At first it doesn't bother you, because you assume as soon as they notice you hard at work, they'll come and help out. But they don't. You start to get angry. You start to bang plates around, you start to slam cupboard doors loud enough to surpass the volume of the television. What does your spouse? Turn the volume up.

But there's more going on this story as well. Mary is doing something no woman is supposed to do, sitting as a disciple. Ken Bailey says that almost every culture has ways of saying one thing and meaning another.

We use phrases like this all the time...like "pull yourself together" (which means calm your emotions) Or "sitting on the fence" (which we all know means, someone is struggling with indecision.)

Middle Eastern culture is no exception. Bailey says part of Marth is really saying is...

"The other rabbis don't have women disciples! What's happening under my nose is outrageous and unprecedented! What will the neighbors think and what will the local rabbis say? Imagine—my sister—a disciple of a rabbi! If she continues she will be involved in daily interaction with *young unmarried men*! Who will marry the poor girl after this? Her reputation will be ruined! She'll *listen to you Jesus!* You *must* tell her that her place is here in the kitchen with me!"

Within the context of the story, Martha is fulfilling the acceptable social role of women...preparing the evening meal for the guests. Mary is choosing the role that women were excluded from fulfilling...sitting at the feet of the rabbi to learn.

And what does Jesus do? He affirms Mary.

⁴¹ “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one.⁴³ Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

In short, Jesus uncompromisingly defends the right of women to be taken seriously as full participants in his band of disciples.

Are you beginning to see, sense, get a feel for the radically inclusive nature of Jesus discipleship program?

Jesus often invited those marginalized or excluded or not socially acceptable to follow him.

In what ways, does the church still have a long way to go in its inclusion of women as full participants in discipleship?

If Jesus were in flesh and blood today, what marginalized groups in our world, do you think he would be sharing meals with and including in his contingent of followers?

Ok, let’s talk about some practical applications that come from this story. **What does it mean to “sit at the feet of Jesus”?**

II. Sitting at Jesus feet

First and foremost it means...

1. Listening to Jesus.

Notice, “Mary sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.”

And it's true she had an advantage over us. She could literally hear Jesus voice. Listening for Jesus voice is little more complicated in our world today.

Sitting at Jesus feet means we need time of intentional focused attention on Jesus and his teachings. Using our mind and intellect to learn what Jesus taught and think about it. It requires concentration and comprehension.

Jesus made it unmistakably clear.

John 8:32 – You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

Good feelings will not set us free.

Ecstatic experiences will not.

Getting on “high on Jesus” will not free us.

Good intentions will not set us free.

John 17:3 – This is eternal life: that they may know God and Jesus Christ.

Romans 12:2 – Be transformed by the renewing of your mind...

Phil 4:8 – Whatever is true, noble, right, pure...think about such things.

The training to become the disciple of a Rabbi in the ancient Jewish began with young boys, grade school and focused initially on learning the Torah. Many young Jewish boys memorized the Jewish Law, even the entire Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 11:18 - ¹⁸ Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ¹⁹ Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ²⁰ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates,

As followers of Jesus, there is an aspect of our faith that requires us to learn the teachings of Jesus. How he lived and what he taught.

Yep it means reading your Bible. I think it also means Bible studies and worship service and small group conversations or joining discipleship classes. And I think it means times of listening prayer. Believing that God's speaks and focused attention listening for God's voice in our lives.

Second,

2. Sitting at Jesus feet may challenge our priorities

There is sometimes a misunderstanding here that Martha was a busy-body preparing the evening meal while, Mary was being the quiet church girl. Sitting for hours listening to Jesus preach. And Jesus said Mary got it right and Martha got it wrong. Therefore, listening to sermons, Jesus teaching, and reading your Bible is more important and more spiritual than serving.

And that's not quite right. Notice Luke doesn't say Martha was too busy, or over-committed...he says, she is **distracted**. Distracted means to be pulled away from something important or primary by something less important. Martha had her priorities wrong.

Maybe it was peer pressure. Maybe she felt the pressure of the stereotypical role of women upon her. Maybe there was a little voice in her head that told her she had to. All good women would do this. Maybe it was her reputation. Maybe that's what she was famous for in town (her hospitality) and she had to live up to that. Whatever it was...Jesus was concerned that her hospitality had replaced and distracted her from something more important...listening to Jesus teach.

It's easy to begin thinking "Well I'm doing good things for the world. I'm volunteering in the community. I'm generous in supporting various underprivileged groups. I'm honest at work. I support social justice efforts. Therefore, I'm following Jesus."

Those service oriented activities certainly are significant and must be part of our discipleship...but they should not replace listening to Jesus.

J. Fitzmeyr says, **“serving (even serving in ministry) that bypasses the teaching of Jesus is one that will never have lasting character.”**

Jesus said, **“Apart from me you can do nothing...”**

Caring for the tired travelers and preparing the meal are good and right in and of themselves. Jesus is not saying every moment of every day must be spent listening to sermons or reading your Bible, but that Martha is distracted from the teachings of Jesus by her “much serving.” Martha’s compassionate serving was taking the place of sitting and listening to Jesus.

And it just makes me wonder how many of us are failing to listen to Jesus because we are distracted...we have mixed up priorities.

When the routine of life that we create, begins to interfere with our time for sitting at the feet of Jesus, then we must re-evaluate our priorities.

It’s usually not bad things will distract us from listening to Jesus... it’s soccer practice, it’s television, it’s facebook, it’s weekend trips, its something planned every night of the week, it’s family gatherings, it’s sleeping in an extra 20 mins rather than getting up to go for a walk with Jesus, it’s one more task at work...none of things are bad or wrong...it’s just that every activity we choose...we are saying yes to one thing and no to another. And each of these choices is creating a priority in your life and ultimately the priorities you set for yourself, will impact the person you become.

And I guess, I'll just say that if listening to Jesus becomes one of those less important activities in your life...don't be surprised if you wake up one day and wonder why you feel miles away from God.

And it's why Jesus says, Mary has chosen what is better. I guess I would just challenge all of us to make sure that in our priorities we have put listening to Jesus near the top.

Finally....

3. Sitting at Jesus feet is to be continually in his presence.

You know how when mom is not around, but you still know what she would say if she was around. As we make listening to Jesus a priority we soon find that we never leave Jesus behind. He goes with us into every other activity of life.

The Disciple – Rabbi relationship was often intimate and personal. It wasn't just about listening to the rabbi teach and then go home for the rest of the day.

In the end discipleship was all about living with, being present with the rabbi, following him, everywhere he went...watching how he would handle his money, fixing meals, doing chores, going to the bathroom.

The ancient Talmud actually tells a story, no joke, about a disciple who snuck under his rabbi's bed so that he would be present when the rabbi and his wife went to bed. He was discovered, and the rabbi wanted to know what his prize pupil was doing next to his slippers. His disciples' response was a classic: "This too is Torah and I need to learn!"

The point is, sitting at Jesus should lead to a constant awareness of his presence with us every moment of every day.

The purpose of the sitting and learning is ultimately to take those lessons and go out and put them into practice in our everyday lives.

Christianity is not mostly about following a religion, or memorizing a set of rules, or words on a page or church attendance. It's not mostly about passing Bible Class 101.

It's mostly listening to and then following a person, Jesus of Nazareth. And so, sitting at Jesus feet is also relational endeavor, where Jesus becomes a real person in our lives. We are regularly, even constantly, aware of his presence with us. Not just when we're sitting in church, but every moment of every day.

Such that every activity we undertake is a spiritual moment with our rabbi from cooking, to cleaning, to fixing dinner to negotiating a contract to driving a bus to watching a movie.