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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
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Sermon on Luke 10:38-42

Worship Theme:

THE ONE THING NEEDED

Most would agree with Jesus that “few things are needed” (Luke 10:42). We understand that people often confuse their wants with needs. However, Jesus said more. “Few things are needed—or indeed only one.” Now we might object. There seems to be more than one true need. Yet, what Jesus said is true. Only one thing—the gospel—can create and sustain the faith that makes us God’s dear children and heirs of the everlasting kingdom. We need the gospel even more than water or oxygen. So, let us listen to Jesus speak, giving him our undivided attention.

Sermon Theme: “Must Do”

What are the “**must-do**”s in your life? It seems these days whenever we ask anybody how they are and what they’ve been up to, we almost always get an answer like “Oh I’ve been so busy with this, that, and the next thing. So much going on, always on the run!” And it doesn’t seem to matter if we’re still in school, parents of school children, or retired empty-nesters – we all have things going on. But it’s still fair to ask: How many of them are absolute “**must-do-this-or-else**” things? We probably don’t ask ourselves that question enough, perhaps assuming that everything we do is equally important. Thankfully, this question is exactly what Jesus invites us to think about today.

In Luke 10, we’re introduced to two sisters, Mary and Martha. *As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary.* What an honor this must have been – Jesus and his disciples were in their home! I can only imagine how many things must have been going through their minds. The cooking, the cleaning, the preparation for a whole group of men to spend some of the day there, perhaps even staying the night. There must have been so much to do!

What a privilege to serve such distinguished guests though. Think about your heroes in life and people you would be unbelievably honored to host in your home. Then imagine if that person brought a whole crew of people with them! There are so many things you would need to do in order to host that many people and of course you would want everything to be absolutely perfect.

That seems to be how Martha felt. I think we sometimes get a little too harsh against Martha. After all, she was just doing what she thought she must in order to be a good hostess by preparing a meal for this group of hungry men. And not just any men! The Savior himself had accepted her invitation to come to her house! The least she could do was feed him and his disciples – this was a **must-do**!

I don’t imagine that anyone quite as famous as Jesus and his disciples will be sitting around my dinner table or yours anytime soon. Yet we can still very easily relate to Martha as we make our lists of things we “**must do**”, things usually

focused on taking care of ourselves, our homes, our families, and everything else we are blessed with. We work in order to earn a paycheck so we can pay our bills and provide for the needs of our family. We get our children involved in various things so they grow up to be well-rounded people who are able to figure out and discover what they like and what they want. We spend time resting and relaxing so that our bodies and minds aren't overwhelmed and burned out and so that we can maintain our health. We fulfill our responsibilities to whatever we have committed ourselves – church activities, sports, community groups. We would probably put these and many other things on our “**must-do**” lists, and it would be pretty difficult to argue with that decision. These are good and important things to do in life!

But which of them is the most important, the most “**must-do**”, something better than all the rest? That is the question which really shows us why so many of us struggle with this in our lives. We can only do one thing at a time! We can't both be putting in time and hours working and also resting and relaxing with our family. If we're looking at a list of things that are all good, even things we say we **must-do**, how can we possibly pick one as better than all the rest, something that is the most important **must-do**?

I spent a lot of time over the past week or so struggling with this reading and these thoughts, which probably perfectly illustrates why the Holy Spirit made sure this account was included in the Bible. It's not just a back-then or a present-day issue. That same struggle is central to this account about Mary and Martha. Both of them knew there were two very good options for things to do on the day Jesus and his disciples came to their house. Everyone needed to eat, so a meal had to be made – this was a very good, very needed thing! And God's Word is crystal clear that salvation and forgiveness are found in no one except Jesus, so listening to him while he spoke and taught was also a very good, very needed thing! How could they possibly choose one or the other when it seemed that both were needed?!

Thankfully in the case of Mary and Martha, Jesus told them! *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!” “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”* This is where it would be easy to attack Martha, but I don't believe we should because that's not what Jesus does. He doesn't tell Martha that humbly and graciously serving her guests by providing for their needs was not important. But he does tell her that in a list of many important **must-do** things that day, one came out higher than the rest.

Throughout our lives, it seems we often have a difficult time figuring out what we should be doing and what truly belongs on our “**must-do**” list. Is it better to be at work earning money to provide for my family or to be home spending time with them? Is it better for me to volunteer my time at the local soup kitchen or to go and visit my aging relatives? Is it better to spend my time at church or doing many other important things in my life? If Jesus doesn't give us a specific answer to every possible scenario, how are we supposed to find what is better?!

I would bet that not one person would be surprised to hear a pastor say “Of course, church is the most important!” Usually that’s when someone would say something like, “You’re a pastor – you have to say that!” But let’s truly explore this for a moment. Is church the most important, and if so, why?

Society has many ways to help people, ways that human beings provide services for one another. Basically anyone who does anything for us that we don’t do for ourselves is providing a service for us to make life better. But do you know where else we find the word “service?” Right here – what we’re doing right now in this place. There’s a very good reason why we call this a church “service.” In fact, there are three main types of service we find in our church services:

1. God serves us with the means of grace, his Holy Word and sacraments.
2. We serve God by worshiping and praising him for everything he does.
3. We serve each other by gathering together for mutual strengthening and encouragement.

Of those three “services”, one is more important and better than the rest, the one without which the other two wouldn’t matter anymore. If God is not serving us with his Word, everything else we do in our lives will (at best) be things that temporarily help people. What an amazing blessing it is that we live in a world where we can do things to temporarily help people around us, even something as simple as making a meal for them, just like Martha did! But no matter how good and wonderful and beneficial it may be, by definition, temporary help doesn’t last. We need something that truly lasts, something eternal.

And that’s where Jesus comes in. Regardless of how many things in life we may label as our “**must-do**”s, only one thing is truly necessary for us, and it isn’t even something on OUR list! The most important **must-do** in the entire human existence is on GOD’S **must-do** list. What is it? Save us. Be the Savior we need. Overcome everything that ruined our existence and the sin which so glaringly gets between us and him. Free us from our captivity to death and hell. Forgive us. Give us a holy family to belong to and an eternal home to dwell in.

And because that was God’s most important **must-do**, it’s exactly what he did. Jesus came to this world to save us. In doing so, he gave us a whole new life to live, a life with amazing and wonderful opportunities to take whatever gifts and abilities God has blessed us with and to use them in service to him and each other. That’s good stewardship of our talents! That’s thanking God for everything he gives us by taking proper care of them and making faithful use of them for his glory and for the benefit of others.

Church can certainly be one of the places we do that – there are many ways we serve God and others here at St. John’s, perhaps as an usher, a member of a stream team, a musician or choir member, a member of a board or committee, someone who helps out with things like Sunday School or VBS, or any of the many other ways people serve around here. Or maybe we volunteer in our community at local shelters, food banks, the library, or the hospital; maybe we coach youth sports; maybe we’re simply doing whatever we can to set an example of what it looks like to be a loving caring supportive person.

But it doesn't matter how busy we are doing good things if God's Word is removed from our life. We should never be so busy with our **"must-do"**s that God's **must-do** for us no longer fits in our schedule. So many people are looking for ways to serve and help people, and that truly is an amazing blessing, whatever and wherever it may be. But only one **must-do** matters most: God's **must-do** for us. It is that **must-do** which drives us to make our highest priority sitting right next to Mary at the feet of Jesus, listening to his Word of grace, mercy, and peace.

That's what Jesus is always most interested in. As we have been reminded several times in God's Word over the past couple months, God doesn't need our service. There is nothing we can do for him that he can't do better himself. Even as God gives us many beautiful opportunities to be involved and to serve, he doesn't need it. He provides for countless needs every single day that we are never even aware of, both our own needs and the needs of others. It truly is a great blessing to know that God so lovingly and so completely provides, both on his own and by inviting people to help and serve other people. Yet nothing is ever more important than the only one that provides for our eternity: God's service to us while we sit at Jesus' feet, listening to his Word. God's **must-do** leads to our **must-do**! We needed to be saved, so God saved us. Now he wants nothing more than to serve us by telling us about it. So his **must-do** and our **must-do** are now one and the same: sit down together with Jesus so that he may fill us with words of life. What a perfect blessing and gift!

Let's pray:

Thank you, Jesus, for serving us with your holy Word and for saving us by your perfect life, death, and resurrection. Continue to give us opportunities to serve you and others, while also reminding us that nothing is more important than sitting at your feet and listening to your Word, for there you give us perfect strength, holiness, forgiveness, peace, and eternal life. For these blessings, we praise and thank you, now and forever. Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.