

## “The Only Thing You Need”

Luke 10:38-42

July 17, 2016

9<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

We throw the word “need” around in a rather frivolous and frequent way these days. There are so many things we *need* and can’t live without. You hear people say, “I need a new iPhone;” “I need satellite TV;” “I need a new HD flat screen television set;” “I need to upgrade my Netflix subscription;” “I need faster internet.” Well, I and many of you come from a generation where our phones were attached to the walls. We watched three (maybe) channels over an antenna on a black and white TV filled with tubes. The only place we ever watched a movie was in a theater. And the only thing “the net” was good for was to hold hair back or catch a fish in.

I’m not trying to be a grumpy old man who will next yell at you to “get off my lawn!” I enjoy every one of the things in that list of luxuries (well, except for the iPhone). But we don’t really *need* them, do we? *Wouldn’t* it be nice if we could determine what it is we actually do need and use our time and energy to pursue it? Is it even possible to determine such a thing? Is it possible to possess it? The Word of God says “yes” to all of the above.

Our problem is our inability to distinguish between a need and a desire. When God created the world, He proclaimed it to be “very good”. Adam and Eve had everything they “needed”. They lacked nothing. Satan’s temptation was to convince them that they were lacking something and to desire that which they didn’t need. That’s how sin entered the world: Adam and Eve desiring what they didn’t need and taking what God had not provided for them.

The same thing is true for us today. We have desires masquerading as so-called “needs” that drive our lives. Many of the things we desire are not wrong or sinful in and of themselves. But since we think we *need* them and just have to have them, our pursuit of them can lead us into sin, away from God, and out of the faith. St. Paul describes this in his first epistle to Timothy where he writes, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” (1 Timothy 6:9-10)

How can we determine what it is that we truly need and not be blinded by sinful desires? St. Paul addresses that issue in that same epistle to Timothy. He writes, “But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” (1 Timothy 6:6-8) We might add shelter and medical care. Others might add one or two other things to the list. Still, that’s a pretty spartan list there. But the fact of the matter is that our actual physical needs are few. And God most often generously provides for those needs.

But we live in a world broken by sin. Because of that, we may not be able to have all that we need. Adequate health care is an example of a need not everyone has being met. Certainly we don’t get all that we desire. But even if we have all our physical needs being met, all of the things we need and all of our luxuries (“greeds”) cannot keep us alive forever. Despite the finest foods, the best medical care, and all of the other things we need or want, each of us will die as a result of our sin. Death is the wage we have earned and the punishment we have deserved for living in opposition to the will of God in our thoughts, our words, and our actions.

Therefore, the need for all of the “stuff” of this life cannot be our single greatest need. We need something more. We need something to do away with the power of sin to kill us. We need something to break the power of death to destroy us forever. What is it that we need? The answer (like the answer to every question in every children’s sermon) is Jesus. We need Jesus. This is what our Gospel lesson for today proclaims to us.

Jesus and His disciples entered the village of Bethany and were welcomed by two sisters, Martha and Mary, into their home. I think that this event is often misrepresented and is unfair, especially to Martha. It is portrayed as bad Martha being concerned only about materialist needs, such as dinner, while good Mary is concerned about spiritual things, such as listening to Jesus. The caricatures of these women are wrong and misrepresent the whole point of the story.

This is not the case of Martha paying attention to materialistic desires while Mary pays attention to spiritual desires, that is, Mary wants Jesus while Martha wants dinner. No. BOTH of them want Jesus, but for different reasons. Martha wants Jesus that she might serve Him. Mary wants Jesus that she might be served by Him. Martha wants to give to Jesus. Mary wants to receive from Jesus.

This is what Jesus commends Mary for. He is not critical of Martha's desire to serve dinner. Rather, Jesus praises Mary for recognizing the one thing that is needed above all other things: hearing Jesus and His Word. Mary has desired this above all things and chosen to satisfy this need above all other needs, physical and spiritual. Jesus promises, "[It] will not be taken away from her." While other needs may fail to be met, this need will never fail to be met.

There is nothing we need more than Jesus. We desire so many things, some of which may be sinful while others may not be very helpful. We need some things which, at best, can only help us temporarily. Jesus is the source of our greatest desires. His Word delivers that which we need to meet our greatest needs.

The Word of God shows us the way to God like a great GPS. In these troubled and confusing times, with all the terrorism, shooting, killing, and dying, what do we need more than to know the One who created everything by the power of His Word and still is in control of everything? His Word shows us Himself.

The Word of God shows us our faults and our failings that keep us separated from the Holy God who judges and condemns all sin and evil. This may not sound like happy news that we want to hear. But hear it we must. Think of it like a medical diagnosis. When the doctor says you have cancer, it is not happy news. But it is good news. Without the diagnosis, you will die. Ignorance is not bliss. But with the diagnosis, you can be led to the treatment which will cure you of your disease and save your life. In the same way, spiritual ignorance is not bliss, either. God judges and condemns the fatal disease of sin in you that He might cure you of your sin and save your lives eternally.

Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the cure for your fatal spiritual disease. He is the One who paid with His own life to obtain the forgiveness for all your sins – big or small, frequent or occasional, thought, word or deed. His blood, shed on the cross, forgives you of everything. He is also the One who, by His death, overcame death that you might live eternally like He does after He rose from the grave to life three days later.

The Word of God delivers to us the blessings which the Word made flesh obtained for us. His Word with water in Holy Baptism washes away our sin, covers us with the holiness of Christ, and adopts us into God's family as His beloved sons and daughters. His Word with the voice of a man called to proclaim it does not merely describe forgiveness, but actually delivers forgiveness to all who hear and believe. His Word combined with bread and wine bring to our mouths the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus and another way to convey to us, this time in the most personal of ways, the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life which His body, nailed to the cross, and His blood, shed on the cross, has earned for us.

These are the things that truly matter. For these are the needs we will always have – through thick and thin, through good times and bad times, through life and in death. Desires will change. Other needs will come and go. But these needs stay with us this side of heaven. That which Jesus gives to us through His Word will continually and completely satisfy those needs like nothing else, good or bad, can.

Therefore, be a Mary, not a Martha. Do not let the desires of this world or even the needs of this life, cause you to be "anxious and troubled about many things," like Martha was. The desires of this world can be fleeting, ultimately non-satisfying, and, if pursued too eagerly by us, can lead us away from the faith. The needs of this life will be met by God, even without our worry. Jesus said, "Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Mt. 6:31-33)

Instead, take the time to sit at Jesus' feet, like Mary, to be in His presence, hear His Word, and receive His many gifts. You may not get everything you desire in your heart. You may not have everything you need in this life. But the gifts Jesus gives will meet your deepest, most important, and eternal needs: forgiveness, life, and salvation. When you do that – when you choose the one and only thing that is necessary – you have Jesus' promise: it will not be taken from you. Amen