

St. Benedict writes, “all guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me.’” I am here to offer the gift of hospitality.

I knew him, you know. I hate to drop names, but I love him so much. It is an honor to be considered his friend. The Christ himself ate at my dinner table. But, what I’m most proud of is that I can honestly say that he was given no more special treatment than any other guest in my home, at least not by me.

My sister and I are as different as night and day. There was that one visit that she made the twelve gasp when she poured that very expensive oil on his feet. She has always been the kind to do things like this. She is a bit dramatic. And, she doesn’t want to miss a thing that the men may be saying, so she was going to sit right there to make sure she heard it all. She has her own gifts.

Mine is hospitality. I may miss the best joke of the evening, but when you leave my home you will have no doubt that you were welcomed there. And, I can cook! My mother taught me well. Mary was never interested, but I took to it right away. I’m known throughout our town for my potluck dishes!

You may find this to be an overstatement, but I really believe that the gift of hospitality is a bit of an art. I work on my home to make it as warm and inviting as it can be. I wouldn’t want anyone to enter it and feel out of place – no matter what his or her circumstances. It is incredibly important to me to provide an atmosphere of openness, a place where a person feels free to share as much or as little about him or herself as they desire, and, of course, a place where good food and drink help to warm our insides as well.

My home became a regular stop, not just for Jesus, but also for many of his followers on their travels. They knew that my door would be open to them whether I knew they were coming or not. I would have a warm bath and a soft bed ready just in case someone came through town. I let Mary handle the conversation. I am content to be in the kitchen or cleaning our friends’ clothes for them, anything I can do to make their lives easier. Jesus laughed at me sometimes, telling me to stop and smell the roses! But, I am. This is how I smell the roses – by making others welcome and happy.

Well, that is my gift to you. I’m much better at doing it than talking about it.

I am so glad you are here. Welcome!

Discussion Suggestions - Martha

We all know that Martha certainly did have a gift for hospitality. But, like many of us, she also had the knack for letting the details of that gift get in the way of serving with her whole heart.

In our Scripture passage from Luke, we see that Martha “was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made” (Luke 10:40 NIV). She went to Jesus and let her frustrations be known about her sister, Mary, leaving all the work to her while Mary sat at Jesus’ feet. She wanted Jesus to tell Mary to get up and help her! The response Martha got from Jesus was probably not at all what she expected: “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41-42) NIV.

Surely this caused Martha to take a step back and collect herself. Here she has been knocking herself out to serve her guests and make them feel welcome while her sister has done none of the work. How can Mary have chosen “what was better?”

When we complain about what we are doing, our heart is not in it. It is not *what* we do in His name; it is *how* we go about doing it--with conviction and joy. Otherwise it is not a ministry but rather it is just a duty.

Sometimes we get distracted by all of the demands we feel are being placed on us. It is easy to forget *why* we are serving and *whom* we are serving. It is crucial that we find a balance somewhere between the **Mary** in us, who wants to sit at Jesus’ feet, and the **Martha** in us, who gets caught up in all of the details of our service.

- ✦ Invite the women in your group recall a time in which they were hosting people in their homes (or church, such as a shower or a Presbytery meeting). Talk about the details of the preparations. Was it a calm, joyous event? Did the work and planning seem overwhelming? What did they do to change their circumstances so that they were able to show hospitality with conviction and joy?
- ✦ Consider the **20/80 Rule**. 20% of the people do 80% of the work. Is this true in your church? How does this make you feel? How do your feelings and attitudes reflect the gift of hospitality?

PRAYER:

Thank you, loving God, for the gift of hospitality. We ask that you lead, guide and direct us so that we keep Christ first in all we do, so that the *details* of your servanthood do not get in the way of the *purpose* of our servanthood. Amen.

As You Depart:

Challenge your group to find an area in their life to practice hospitality this week.