

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

7/18/10 **Mary, Martha, and Jesus** **Luke 10: 38-42**

How do you describe a faithful person, a person who is steadfast in faith in Christ?

For that, I would lift up Mary, the younger sister of Martha. You know the episode.

Jesus was invited to the home of two sisters. The elder sister was Martha; the younger one was Mary.

Martha was nervous that day; she felt she had to entertain Jesus. She was working frantically to make herself and her home acceptable to him.

Mary, the younger sister, on the other hand, sat at the feet of Jesus, paying close attention to every word he was speaking.

Seeing her sister unhelpful, Martha was irritated. She interrupted Jesus and said, "Teacher, please tell my sister to help me."

Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, you are getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing is important. Mary has chosen it."

Now why is Mary an epitome of steadfast faith, and Martha is not?

In order for us to answer this question, we need to put the story in its historical context.

Within the Jewish social world, women were nobodies. Women were separated from men in public life and therefore almost invisible. Adult women were to be veiled in public. Meals outside the family were always male only affairs.

So we can understand that it was unthinkable and totally unacceptable for women to invite men into their homes. Mary and Martha broke this social taboo for Jesus.

And yet, the ways Mary and Martha welcomed Jesus were different.

Mary sat at the foot of Jesus. She opened herself to every word he spoke. She was completely focused on Jesus.

Martha's focus, on the other hand, was on entertaining Jesus. To state the matter more concretely, Martha was not completely liberated from the stereotype of women that her Jewish society forced upon her. She lacked the total devotion of her sister Mary. What does all this mean to us? It is two fold. First, if we are honest with ourselves, we cannot deny that we are not Mary; we are all Martha.

Second, Jesus spoke to the aggravated Martha by calling her twice, "Martha, Martha."

In the Bible, calling another's name twice is an expression of tenderness toward that person. That is, Jesus gently chided Martha and persuaded her to learn her younger sister's absolute devotion to him.

Christ loved Mary, to be sure, but he did not give up on Martha, either. That is to say, he does not give up on us.

Let us do our best to sit at the feet of Jesus today. Let us try to be Mary this week. That is all Jesus requires of us. He will take care of the rest.

Thanks be to God.