

I do not think that Martha was singing that day – humming a happy song as she lovingly prepared a loaf of bread for Jesus. Her mind could have been filled with the vision of Jesus' joy as he sniffed the aroma of fresh baked bread and tasted how good bread and life could be. Her heart could have been overflowing with the excitement of having Jesus as guest and being privileged to serve him. But instead her ears were tuned to her sister's questions as she sat at Jesus feet – Martha's mind was focused on the aching in her arms as she kneaded the dough, her heart bitter with the injustice of it all – Martha carrying all the burden – Mary having all of Jesus' attention.

“Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.”

When she volunteered to do altar duty she had no idea all that was involved: changing paraments, putting up hymn numbers, filling the candles, preparing the Bible for the lector, preparing the bread and the wine, placing flowers, cleaning up and putting everything away again. She had no idea how much had to be ordered, and paid for, and anticipated. And it seems the only time anyone notices is when something goes wrong. Then everyone looks in the bulletin to see who has altar duty.

“Lord, do you not care that they do not help us with this work? Tell them to help.”

He cares about the flowers, waters, weeds, makes special trips to the church to make sure that things look nice. He is glad to do it. But not all of it. If only a few more would be pulling weeds and tending beds then the pride he has in his church, the love he has for his church would be evident for all to see. But so many just come to worship and walk right by the weeds, do not even see the need for helping hands.

Lord, do not care that they are not doing their fair share? Tell them to help.

The alarm goes off on Sunday morning – after a long week of work she longs to sleep in but a Sunday School class is depending on her. Teaching other people's children costs her – time for preparation, time for teacher's meetings, time for helping with programs, parties and events. Sometimes the cost is more than time – snacks and

extras that come out of her money. Some weeks parents do not even bring their kids – most weeks they never say thanks.

Lord do you not care that I give so much. Tell them to help.

Martha's work was important. Welcoming guests is always important – especially providing for Jesus. Luke tells us about the women who gave their own money to provide food for Jesus and his disciples. Someone had to – God did not send down coins from heaven. But what could have been sweet for Martha and for Jesus had turned sour.

“Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part which will not be taken away from her.”

Sitting at Jesus feet, listening to him – that is the better portion. It is the portion that we gather each week to receive. Our Lord feeds us with his word, with his body and blood, with his forgiveness, with his promises. Unless we receive that portion regularly our spirits starve. And what we undertook in joy can turn into a bitter burden.

It is not enough to prepare the altar or teach Sunday school, or care for the grounds. Gathering with God's people to feast on Jesus is even more important. But having feasted it is vital that we all share the tasks of our common life.

20% of the people do 80% of the work. 20% of the people give 80% of the money. I am guessing that 20% of the people do 80% of the praying as well. This seems to be a pattern in every group. As long as the 20% have their ears and hearts tuned to Jesus the load they carry is not too heavy. But when hearts are focused on them – on what the 80% are not doing, then it is time to take a break.

If Martha's arms were weary that day she could have sat down – that is what Jesus wanted her to understand. Instead of complaining to Jesus, she might have asked Mary for help.

Sometimes at home or at church I am playing the role of martyr. See how hard I am working, what a burden I am bearing. When I am wearing my martyr uniform asking for help is the last thing I want to do. It feels so weak to ask. Instead I complain, and accuse and turn bitter.

Jesus did not go out in the kitchen and yell at Martha for not being like Mary. But when her serving had turned sour he wanted her to let go.

Pay attention to what is going on in your heart. Before bitterness sets in ask for help.

Jesus will give you what you need. Amen.