

SERMON FOR JULY 17, 2022

TEXT: LUKE 10:38-42

THEME: LET YOUR FOCUS BE ON THE WORD OF GOD

**38** Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. **39** And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. **40** But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." **41** But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, **42** but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

In the name of Jesus:

Recently I was having a conversation with a pastor who came to faith in Jesus Christ later in life. I always find these stories interesting, and instructive, for these stories not only remind us of what we already know, but they also serve as a powerful witness and example for us and others. The conversation I share with you is his story as shared with me.

His name is Powell Woods. If you were to describe his life, well, he describes his life,, by his own admission, as a Horatio Algier type of story. Only in reverse. Instead of rags to riches, he would categorize it as riches to rags. He didn't grow up in the church, but he had loving parents and a great education. Growing up, he would readily admit that he had many good breaks and good fortune in his life. As a young man, academia was his love and his

pursuit. He ended up teaching at a major university, in the area of literature. He climbed the ladder of success in the academic world, by all accounts he should have found happiness and success. But in the end, he was miserable. He kept searching for something that would give him peace, something that would be foundational in his life, but for all that he searched, he came up empty. He would agree with Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, who tried all that the world had to offer, only to come up empty. Powell would agree with Solomon who wrote in the Bible: "Vanity of vanity, all is vanity." All that the world had to offer didn't offer Powell peace or contentment. He continually felt uneasy in his heart and in his life.

He had tried everything, but to no avail. The one thing he didn't try was going to church. His wife, Karen, had been going to church for a while, so Powell decided to go as well in his quest for meaning and purpose in life. On one Sunday, the pastor mentioned in his sermon that it is only when a person hits rock bottom and has nowhere to go and no one to turn to that the person would then be receptive to hearing about Jesus and receiving what Jesus has to offer. Powell thought the pastor was talking specifically to him.

When Powell got home he prayed with Karen for the Lord to show him the way. Karen told Powell that he needed to quit his job and just stay at home, Karen would become the sole provider, and at Karen's instruction and

insistence, Powell began to read the Bible. Now remember, Powell was steeped in all sorts of literature, he was, by profession, a former professor at a major university teaching in the area of literature. He had read all sorts of literature, but he had never seriously read the Bible.

For ten months Powell stayed at home, reading the Bible everyday while Karen went to work. Powell recalls that around the tenth month of his reading the Bible, that a light went on for him. He was reading the Book of Lamentations, a depressing book if there ever was one. It probably is the most depressing book of the whole Bible. It was written by the prophet Jeremiah as a result of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Jeremiah had prophesied about Jerusalem's impending destruction and doom. To foretell it and then see it happen before his very eyes was almost too much for Jeremiah to bear. And so in the book of Lamentations Jeremiah laments, he weeps over the destruction of his homeland and the city he lived in.

But in the middle of this depressing book there is hope! Jeremiah writes in jubilation: "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: **22** The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;**23** they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Powell read those words and felt as if God was personally speaking to him! He now had that peace that he was searching for, now He knew of Jesus, His love for sinners,

including Powell, and Powell now had that peace that surpassed anything that he had ever known before. He belonged to Jesus, and from that point on, Powell began to follow Jesus everyday throughout his life.

Did I tell you that Powell later became a pastor? When he came to faith in Christ, he had made his way up the corporate ladder. He held the position of head of Human Resources at the Nestle Corporation. But Powell felt that call that all pastors feel when Jesus calls men into the Holy Ministry. Powell went to Seminary, was ordained into the ministry, and served as Pastor at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Solon. He retired at the age of 70, and took a year off, but then returned to the ministry and now is, at the age of 81, Pastor of Hope Lutheran Church in Aurora Ohio. Powell will tell you from personal experience the power of the Word of God and how God uses His Word to change a person. Powell discovered what Jesus was speaking about in our Gospel lesson for today, about the one thing needful.

Mary and Martha were sisters, and Jesus came to pay a visit. Martha welcomed Jesus into the home and was busy trying to be a good hostess. Mary, though, upon welcoming Jesus into the house, didn't bother to lend a hand to help, she just sat at Jesus' feet and listened to Jesus.

Martha was put out by Mary's behavior, and complained: "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." **41**

But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, **42** but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

The one thing needful is Jesus and His Word. This is the lesson that Martha learned a couple of thousand years ago, it is a lesson that Pastor Powell Woods learned in his life, and it is a lesson that you and I need to learn still today.

Jesus, in speaking to His disciples and followers about His death and resurrection said: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **35** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. **36** For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? **37** For what can a man give in return for his soul? “

What can a man give in return for his soul? Nothing, nothing at all, for Jesus paid the price to make all of us His own so that we might live with Him forever. Jesus speaks to you in and through His Word, giving you forgiveness, life, and salvation. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ. Instead of finding excuses as to why you can't be in Bible Study or why you don't have time to read the Bible, Jesus tells you to repent, to remember the one thing that is needful, namely faith in Christ.

His Word is living and active, bringing people to faith like Jesus did with Pastor Woods, and strengthening that faith for those who are in the Word. So turn to His Word, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest His Word, for His Word is a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. Jesus and His Word will save you, will lead and guide you, it will change your life. Just ask Pastor Woods.

To the glory of God and in Jesus' name

Amen