

Sermon #1,270 (Funeral Sermon #46): Luke 10:38-42
6-17-17 (Funeral Service for Leone Davis), Bethany-Princeton MN

Christian Obituary for Leone Davis

Leone Mary (Meyer) Davis was born on Feb. 22, 1936, to Elvin and Glendora Meyer in Santiago Township, Minn. The Triune God who gave her life also gave her the new birth and saving faith when she was baptized in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost on March 15, 1936. She confessed this faith publicly when she was confirmed June 4, 1950, at Our Savior's Lutheran Church (ELS) in Santiago. Leone partook in the joys of regularly being gathered by the Holy Spirit, as a communicant member at Our Savior's and later at Bethany Lutheran Church (ELS) in Princeton. The Holy Spirit preserved her in faith until June 9, 2017, when the holy angels carried her soul to heaven. She will receive Christian burial today, June 17, to await the resurrection of her body when the Lord Jesus Christ returns on the last day with all His holy angels.

God's tender mercies to Leone included giving her children Warren (wife Sue), Lowell (wife LuAnn), Brian, and Lynn (husband Rick) Johnson; 8 grandchildren and 8 great grandchildren. Blessed be her memory.

LEONE HELD ONTO THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

St. Luke 10:38-42. ³⁸ Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." ⁴¹ And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴² But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." Lord, these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth; Your Word is truth. Thank You, Lord, for making it so Leone didn't neglect the one thing needful but regularly sat at Jesus' feet to hear His Word. This gives us certainty regarding her salvation, since thanks to regularly hearing the Word she lived and believed in Jesus and thus shall never die. Bring all who love Leone to become properly prepared, as Leone was, to enter into eternal life by making the hearing of the Word a priority in life. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in our risen Lord Jesus Christ, especially Leone's dear ones: The peace of the Lord be with you. Amen.

Leone's middle name was Mary. The middle name often is a hidden part of your identity. Likewise, the Mary part of Leone was more hidden.

What everyone saw may have made them think of her as a Martha - very busy and active, concerned with all the details of hosting and providing for people in whatever she was engaged in at church, at home, with her neighbors and in the community (for instance at the Clothing Center), making sure everything was done right, prepared right, and looking right, and like Martha being vocal about it if necessary. She was probably pegged as a Martha, as unfortunately many women are, unfairly.

We tend to divide people based on this Bible story into Marthas and Marys, which is a mistake. If you are pegged as a Martha you are seen as overly devoted to duties and busyness, which actually misrepresents this Martha. If you place a priority on hearing God's Word you are seen as contemplative and not as useful to others, which isn't true of this Mary.

Leone was a Mary also in the true sense. Each Sunday she was one of the first to take her seat in the church. She came to hear God's Word. She prepared herself for the service. She listened and received what Jesus came to speak to her in the absolution, in the Scripture lessons and the sermon, and in the Lord's Supper and the blessing. She was not just a doer in the Martha sense. She was a receiver like Mary. She came to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His Word regularly. Still, these are all on the outside. They are *signs* and *fruits* of her faith, but the faith she had is something only God could see. This is "*the hidden person of the heart*" (1 Pe 3:4), and as this Bible text shows it's the most important part.

We hear Jesus say: "**One thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.**" These words are true of Leone. We didn't know we were about to lose her. But Leone had chosen that good part - not by her own strength, she was totally unable to choose to believe, but the faith in Jesus her Savior was given to her by the Holy Spirit and to her it was her most precious possession. So Jesus' promise that "that good part" - her salvation by faith alone - "**will not be taken away from her,**" came true. She clung to the one thing needful,

her faith and salvation and hope of eternal life was not taken from her, and now it never will be, she is completely safe forever in heaven above.

How do we know this? That is what this story of Mary and Martha teaches. When it says that **“Martha was distracted with much serving,”** and although she **“welcomed Jesus into her house”** she hardly even noticed Him after that, went about all her busy preparations and even rebuked Jesus for not telling Mary to help her, this shows how it’s impossible to gain salvation and accomplish anything by our own good works.

That is what so many people think. That is the way we naturally think: that if we do outwardly good things, if we try hard, if we do more good than bad, then God will let us into His heaven; that if God is angry with you because of your sins, He will be happy with you because of your good works; that you go to heaven for being a basically good person.

But the problem with that is sin. Because everyone is born with sin – including Leone – we are unable to please God. **“Your sin has separated you from your God” (Isa 59:2)**, the Bible says. It also says: **“There is none who does good, no, not one” (Rom 3:12)**, and: **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23)**. This means that in and of ourselves, all God can see in us is sin and it condemns us.

We see such sin in this account from the life of Christ. Martha resents her sister, points out her sister’s faults to the Lord and compares her with herself to make herself look better, hurts her sister with her words, accuses her, and worst of all fails to trust the Lord but looks only to herself. Leone had these sins and many more as well. This is why she came to church: not because she was so good and pure, not to prove she was holier than others, but she came every week to be made holy, because she knew she sinned every day; she came to church to be forgiven by God.

So what is the message here with this Scripture lesson, as applied to Leone? Is it that Mary is in the right in contrast with Martha because she made right choices, and likewise Leone was good in God’s sight because she came to church regularly? No. Mary’s listening to Jesus’ words is not a work of hers that made her righteous in God’s sight. Salvation doesn’t come that way either, for the Bible says: **“by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified” (Gal 2:16)**. So even though I can say many won-

derful things about Leone's example in attending church regularly, this is not what gives us a sure and certain hope today for her salvation.

Instead, all our joy and certainty for this comes from Jesus. We learn this first from the Bible text, where we hear that Jesus came to Bethany and **"Mary sat at His feet and heard His word."** Their blessedness and salvation were not about Mary being so obedient or Martha less obedient to Jesus. Everything depended on Jesus giving faith through His Word.

This is what happened for them. We see this later when their brother Lazarus dies. Both Mary and Martha, at that time, exhibit true faith in Jesus' power to raise their loved one from the dead. They speak this faith. Jesus asks Martha if she believes that her brother will rise, and she says yes. Where did Martha get this faith? I believe that after Jesus directed her to the importance of hearing His Word – **"that good part that will not be taken away"** – Martha did sit down to listen to Him. Jesus gave true faith to Martha through His Word, just as He had to Mary. As the Bible says, this faith is a gift that only comes from hearing the Gospel: ***"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God"*** (Rom 10:17).

A key component of this is that it is faith in Jesus. The sisters didn't know it but Jesus was on His way to the cross. The Jesus they believed is the one who saved them by His blood. He paid for all their sins by His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. When He rose from the dead, God accepted His death as full payment for all their sins. This is how Mary and Martha's sins were forgiven: by Jesus' death. His Word – even before His death – delivered this forgiveness to them and enabled them to benefit from Jesus' saving work by faith in Him.

This is also what our joy and certainty of Leone's salvation is based on. Everyone would see Leone's tough, no-nonsense, fun-loving exterior. God made her that way. He created her whole glorious lively personality that we miss. But underneath was the soft part – which came out (as you know better than I) in the careful, time-consuming lengths she would go to do kind things for people even whom she was giving a hard time – but inside, hidden away, was the part of her that knew and felt her sins, that could be hurt, that felt regret, that could be provoked and then feel guilt over her words or actions, and that felt unsure of God's grace.

This is the part of her that Jesus spoke to, not in her imagination but in His words. Jesus' own words of forgiveness, for her and to her. He came to this Bethany, Leone's church. He came here, in Word and Sacrament, to forgive sins – Leone's sins too. Leone came to church Sunday after Sunday because she knew Jesus would be here and would speak to her.

When she came to church she sat at Jesus' feet. She listened to His words that said: *"I forgive you all your sins,"* and: *"This is My body ... This is My blood ... given and shed for you for the remission of sins."* When I visited Leone in her home and I would ask her: "Do you believe that Jesus died for you?" she would say without hesitation: "Yes."

This is why we can be glad today. Leone had faith in Jesus her Savior. She clung to the one thing needful. As one of our hymns says: *"I cling to what my Savior taught/And trust it, whether felt or not"* (ELH 226:10).

She couldn't have kept this faith on her own, staying away from where Jesus promised to come meet her. She had this faith as a gift from Him, she received it, only by being in His presence where His words were spoken to her and produced this faith. She wasn't only a Martha but a true Mary. Now it is no longer hidden but the hosts of heaven rejoiced and welcomed her when she was brought there by faith alone. May we all be brought there, by joining her now while we have opportunity, at the feet of Jesus to hear His Word. **"One thing is needed."** Amen!