

Mary & Martha – The Soul Sisters of Stewardship

A Conversation & Stewardship Moment

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT

November 9, 2025 – Morning worship

Text: Luke 10:38-42

This morning we are trying something new – sort of. As you have hopefully discerned by now we are right smack in the middle of Stewardship season here in the church. If we have your street address on file with us for hard copy mailings, you already received a copy of this year's Stewardship mailing sometime in the last few days. If you haven't yet joined the church and we only have your email address on file, we still hope you will find it in your heart to pledge but we didn't send you a Stewardship letter and pledge form by email. That just didn't sit right with me for several reasons but you can still find a stewardship letter and pledge form here and we do hope you'll pick one up so you can offer your financial support to the church in a more consistent way which helps with our budgeting process.

So what is Stewardship anyhow? That's a question that the Stewardship letter hopefully answers but it warrants a brief discussion here, which is exactly what we will be doing together in a few minutes. Suffice to say for the moment that Stewardship is the umbrella term which encompasses all the ways in which we support this church with our time, our talents and our treasure. Some people think of Stewardship as the philanthropic outreach of the church – in other words, only as the means by which we solicit funds to keep our doors open. That's true, as far as it goes, but it doesn't go nearly far enough. In truth, Stewardship encompasses all the ways in which we live into our personal covenant with God and Jesus each day as people seeking to follow the way of Christ. It is how we put into practice what we say we

believe: That we are working to love God with all that we are and all that we have and to show that love through loving the other as much as we love ourselves. The church – this church – is where we gather in community to practice and refine exactly that.

So, in just a few moments the Stewardship Team and myself will be inviting you to engage in a conversation about how each one of us can respond to this Stewardship campaign personally. But first, I do want to pause briefly to talk about two women with whom you are probably already acquainted. They were friends of Jesus and their brother Lazarus was the one whom Jesus raised from the dead shortly before his final trip to Jerusalem. Their names were Mary and Martha and our Scripture text this morning is about a time when they had Jesus over to their home for dinner. The story of how the two sisters handled this visit with Jesus is something we can imagine happening between two sisters who have very different personalities and very different ways of interacting with Jesus. Martha is like so many of us who just like to be busy because she wants everything to be just so for a special guest. With Martha in charge we can imagine the table where Jesus would sit was set beautifully, the smells of dinner cooking would have greeted him as soon as he walked in the door. Cool water would have been waiting for him as would a basin and some towels so he could freshen up. Martha had been busy all day and she was still fretting about things once Jesus arrived.

Mary, on the other hand, was much more laid back. We can imagine her half-heartedly brooming the house as she watched anxiously for Jesus out the window. As soon as he arrived and got settled into a seat, she immediately sat at his feet – as you would have done when a great teacher came into your home – and the conversations began. Martha waited for a bit, still scurrying around fussing with details. But then, she got irritated at what

she saw as Mary's laziness. To her it seemed like Mary was more than happy to let her do all the work and monopolize Jesus' attention in the process. So she finally goes to Jesus and says, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work?" But, she doesn't get the answer she was hoping for. Instead, Jesus seems to scold her! "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." Yikes! Sounds kind of harsh, doesn't it?

But is it?? Depends on your perspective. Yes, Jesus is clearly saying to Martha that Mary is fine right where she is, taking time with Jesus as though she already realizes their time to talk like this will be all too brief. This is why Jesus says this time talking with him won't be taken away from Mary. But, does he really mean to say this is "the better part?" Yes, I think he meant to say it, but not in the way we usually think. He is not saying Martha is wrong for making the choice not to talk with Jesus. He is not saying Mary was right to make that choice as she did. He is saying Mary was right to do what she needed to do for Mary in that moment. Jesus recognized, better than the sisters themselves, that Martha needed to be busy and Mary needed to talk with Jesus. He suggests to Martha that she needs to be more patient with her sister, and perhaps we assume he is saying Martha should also be sitting with him just to talk. But, I don't think so. I think Jesus wanted each sister bringing their authentic selves to that moment with him and he wanted both sisters to see the value in the other's choice. We're the ones that layer on other meanings in this story. Not Jesus.

So why am I calling Martha and Mary the "soul sisters of Stewardship" this morning? Simple. They both responded to Jesus as themselves, bringing everything they had into his

presence. Martha brought her time and her talents in preparing their home and their meal for this time together, showing how precious it was to her through her actions. Mary did the exact same thing, even though it looked very different. Mary brought her time and gifted it to Jesus at his feet. She brought her talent for listening and talking with someone whom she knew needed both. And, since they both were part of the same household, I am thinking they shared their treasure – their financial resources – in order to purchase and prepare the meal and everything else needed to make for an enjoyable respite for their dear friend Jesus who spent so much time trudging through dusty towns and eating whatever he and the disciples could scrounge up. It took the efforts of Mary *and* Martha to respond to Jesus that evening just like it takes all of us to respond to the needs of our church as we seek to build and nurture this community of Jesus' followers here in this place.

So here's what we're going to do now. The Stewardship Team has brainstormed this interactive experience so that we can explore how Jesus might be wishing each of us would respond to the needs of our church right now. We have two baskets here and a wishing well on the baptismal font. In one basket is a giant penny with a wish for how someone could support the church written on the back. We are going to ask for volunteers from all of YOU to come forward – one at a time – and choose a penny, read it out loud and then tell us whether you think the wish is for a time, a talent or a treasure response and why. Then you can put it in the wishing well and return to your seat. We will follow this same procedure until the heart basket is empty of pennies, unless you can think of even more wishes... Then, following this, our Stewardship Team members will come out to you and ask you to choose a “penny” from the other basket to consider if that

particular wish is something you are willing to make come true for our church. If it is, then please write your name on it and come up during the final hymn and put it in the wishing well. Got it??

Okay, let's go! ...

Mary and Martha would be proud of you, especially for those of you stretching beyond your comfort zone in response to our wishing well pennies! Thanks in advance for your support of our church in the ways you are able. It is assuredly most deeply appreciated. Amen.