

Choosing the Better Part in a Busy World

The sermon preached by Dr Keith Burns at Rosyth Methodist Church,
at Morning Worship on 20 May 2025

The readings were: Colossians 1:15–28; Luke 10:38–42



Life can often feel like a long list of demands. Work, house chores, caring for loved ones, replying to emails, keeping up with appointments, and trying to stay in touch with friends — many of us live in a constant state of motion. Even in quieter moments, our minds race: *Did I remember to email that friend? What's for dinner tomorrow? Have I forgotten something important?*

In the middle of this whirlwind of responsibilities and expectations, the lectionary readings from Luke and Colossians offer us a surprising and gentle invitation — not to do more, but to slow down. Not to strive harder, but to centre our lives on Christ, the one who truly holds everything together.

In Colossians 1, Paul gives us one of the most beautiful descriptions of Christ in the New Testament. Christ, he writes, is “the image of the invisible God” and “in him all things hold together.” These words are

not just theological poetry; they speak to something deeply practical and personal. Paul is reminding the believers — and us — that Jesus is not a distant figure from the past or someone we check in with only on Sundays. He is present with us, in the midst of our everyday lives. Christ is with us in the kitchen as we wash up, at our desks when the emails pile up, in our cars during traffic, and in the quiet hours of the night when sleep won't come.

The story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10 brings this truth into the heart of the home. Martha is doing something good — serving, preparing food, hosting guests. These are acts of kindness and hospitality. Her sister Mary, on the other hand, sits at Jesus' feet, simply listening. Eventually, Martha becomes frustrated and asks Jesus to intervene: “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

Jesus responds gently and lovingly: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part.” His words are not a rebuke of Martha's service, but a reminder that even good things can become distractions if they pull us away from what matters most: being with Him.

In today's world, many of us are deeply familiar with Martha's experience. We strive to be dependable, capable, and efficient. We try to keep everyone happy, to meet expectations, and to hold everything together — often feeling that if we don't do it, no one will. In this kind of world, our value is often measured by our output, and busyness is worn like a badge of honour.





But Jesus offers us another way: the way of presence, peace, and rest in Him.

This doesn't mean abandoning our responsibilities. Jesus never says that Martha's work is unimportant. What He offers is a reordering of our hearts — a call to come to Him first, to centre our lives in His presence, so that everything else flows from that place of stillness and love. When we take time to be with Him, even briefly, we find that our work becomes lighter and our relationships richer.

Paul's message to the Colossians mirrors this invitation. The believers in Colossae were facing pressure from different teachings and philosophies. Paul brings them back to the heart of the gospel: Christ alone. He reminds them that Jesus is the beginning and the end, the one in whom all things find their meaning. Christ is not only the foundation of our faith — He is the centre of our lives.

It can be helpful to picture a garden. We might have good soil, useful tools, and beautiful plants. But if the roots are shallow or neglected, the garden will wither. Christ is our root system — He grounds us, nourishes us, and gives us stability when life becomes stormy. And life does have seasons: seasons of busyness, seasons of grief, seasons of joy. In every season, Christ calls us to draw close to Him.

Some of us might be living through a Martha season right now — constantly doing, giving, moving. That can be faithful and generous. But even in those seasons, we are invited to make space for moments like Mary's — moments of stillness, where we allow Jesus to speak to us, renew us, and remind us that we are loved not for what we do, but for who we belong to.

Paul understood this tension. He describes his own ministry as hard work — toiling and struggling — but he does so with a remarkable qualifier. He says he labours “with all the energy that Christ powerfully inspires within me.” Paul isn't drawing from his own strength; he's relying on the strength of Christ in him. What a relief it is to know that we do not have to carry our lives alone.

The truth is, most of life is lived in ordinary moments — making tea, doing errands, caring for others. But even these can become sacred spaces when we turn our hearts toward God. A simple prayer whispered in the middle of the day, a deep breath before a difficult phone call, a quiet moment of gratitude as we finish a chore — these are all ways to choose the better part.

Sometimes we may feel too busy to pray or too distracted to be still. But being with Jesus doesn't have to be long or elaborate. It might be five minutes of silence with a cup of tea, or a short prayer while walking to the shops. What matters is the intention to turn toward Him — to remember that He is already with us.

Jesus' gentle words to Martha are not only meant for her; they are for us too: “You are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one.” He is not scolding her — or us. He is inviting us to return. To let go of the pressure and the noise, and to come back to the one thing that matters most.

As Paul says, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” This is not a God who is far away, but One who dwells within us, who strengthens us, and who gives us peace in the middle of whatever we're facing.





What would it look like this week to carry that awareness with us? To begin each day with a short prayer: “Jesus, help me to stay close to You today.” To pause in the middle of a busy afternoon and remember: “You are with me. I don’t need to do this alone.”

May we be people who serve with Martha’s hands but keep Mary’s heart. May we find moments to pause, to sit, and to listen. And may we discover, again and again, that Christ is the one who holds everything together — including us.

Our picture of Christ in the House of Martha and Mary was painted in 1628 by Jan Brueghel the Younger and Peter Paul Rubens, an example of artistic collaboration between two of the Flemish Baroque era’s most celebrated painters. The image is in the public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

You may enjoy the reflection on the painting at <https://christian.art/daily-gospel-reading/luke-10-38-42-2025/>.