

**Sermon Series: Life Together**  
**Sermon Title: The Day Alone**  
**Luke 10:38-42**

**by David Hockett**  
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I am so grateful for you Boone UMC and your heart for children and youth. I am also grateful for our staff, for Colette Krontz and her faithful team of ministry servants, for Dan who supports her so amazingly well, for our confirmation leaders, for all who are deeply devoted to our Confirmation ministry and who helped make today possible. And I am grateful for you parents who have helped your youth make their faith a priority by encouraging them, praying for them, and bringing them to Sunday school, and worship, and confirmation classes. I look forward to our confirmands' journey continuing later in the summer as they become a part of our youth ministry.

This morning we are celebrating the confirmation of twenty four youth. We come to offer our prayers and support as they begin to lean more fully into their baptism and the life to which they have been called in Christ. For the past several months they've been exploring and experiencing life together so it's fitting that we continue with the third part of our series on Bonhoeffer's book *Life Together*, today focusing our attention on what Bonhoeffer calls "the day alone."

So, Martin Luther once remarked, "I have so much business that I can't possibly get on without spending 3 hours daily in prayer." And yet I bet many of us get on with the work of the day, even the work of the Church, and then, as an afterthought, offer up a quick prayer asking God to bless what we've accomplished.

After all, with so much to be done how can we even think about taking time out for prayer or for simply sitting and being alone with God. That is a luxury busy, productive people simply cannot afford.

Our tendency is to want to get on with things, to keep things moving, to be productive, busy with the work of the Church. How many of us actually ever really enjoy those moments which by the world's standards are a waste of valuable time in which we could be busy for God, but by the kingdom's standards may be some of the most important moments of our lives? My guess is that for many of you, life is filled with busyness and noise and distraction, maybe even filled with the busyness of the Church. Most of us rarely experience those holy moments at Jesus' feet simply listening for the voice of God. We're just too busy for that, we say. And yet, Bonhoeffer suggests that it is only through investing time alone with God, sitting in silence under the Word, meditating and reflecting on scripture, and carrying the needs and concerns of the world to God in prayer are we then able to serve faithfully. In other words, being comes before doing. A faithful life of serving with others flows from a faithful life of listening to Jesus alone in prayer.

In his book *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster argues that our Adversary majors in three things; noise, hurry, and crowds. Our lives are indeed testimonies to the fact that we are busy, productive people. Our schedules even at Church can be overwhelming and it is like a badge we often wear with pride. Most of us have been taught to be active, productive people, to make the most of our time, to get as much done as possible every day.

As such, we may even be a bit skeptical of the usefulness, the effectiveness, or even the faithfulness of time spent in worship or in prayer – time in which we could be *doing* something. After all, what difference does our worship and prayer really make? What difference does this hour make in the lives of our neighbors and in the life of the world? Isn't the world pretty much the same after we have been here on Sunday morning and wouldn't our time be better spent being busy, serving our Lord? We should be out there in the world serving, building, working, busy doing the work of God's kingdom, and yet Bonhoeffer warns us that without time alone with Jesus we may be doing more harm than good.

In this morning's gospel lesson, Luke tells us that Jesus' journey with his disciples has brought him to the home of a woman named Martha. Mary is also there when Jesus arrives. It seems that it is close to meal time and Martha is busy preparing dinner for her guests. Jesus' arrival in this small town has got to be big news and so Martha wants to make sure that everything is just right. And so, she's busy - cleaning, cooking, preparing the table, serving Jesus. Mary, on the other hand, is from Martha's perspective, busy doing nothing. With guests in the home and a meal to prepare, Mary is just sitting there listening to Jesus. But Martha was busy, and distracted by her many tasks, and she says to Jesus, "Lord, Mary has left me to do all of the work by myself. Tell her to get up, stop wasting time, and give me a hand." But Jesus answered, "Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part."

Richard Foster has suggested that what the world and the Church needs is not more intelligent people, not more gifted people, and certainly not more busy people. Rather, what the Church, what the world desperately needs is deep people. Confirmands, what the world needs is people who are spending time regularly sitting at Jesus' feet, people investing in time alone listening to God. People whose lives are bathed in prayer and whose discipleship, whose busyness, is rooted in a life lived in communion with our Lord. The Church, the world needs people who recognize that faithful Christian service is more than mere busyness, but an awareness and ability to be engage in those acts of service that are truly important and faithful because we have spent time at the feet of Jesus learning from and listening to him. If you are not careful you can become slaves to your own schedules and calendars to the point that serving God becomes just one more thing to do on a list that is already overwhelming. It is easy, even in the Church, to become so preoccupied with the overwhelming demands of the work of the gospel, that we miss the better part and our Christian

service becomes not faithful service to our Lord, but frantic activity aimed at trying to prove how faithful we are.

Michael Ramsey has said, “The world has lost the way of resting, seeing, loving, and praising and is swept along in ceaseless activity, the world does not pause to consider, to pray, to invest time each day alone with God. With no resting and no contemplation and no prayer the power to see is lost: to see where we are going, to see the large perspectives and to see our fellow human beings as they really are, as those created in the image of God.” (107) When we lose the ability to see our fellow human beings in this way, then we no longer see the world from the perspective of Jesus. How can we expect to look upon the world with compassion if we never spend time with the one who first has shown compassion to us? How can we faithfully follow, if we do not intimately know the one whom we are following? How can we speak the word of the Lord into the world if we never pause and actually listen to the word? We are not called to be a busy people, but faithful people and faithfulness requires that we, like Mary, invest each day in time alone with Jesus.

So, confirmands, it is not wrong that Martha is serving Christ in the way she has chosen rather, faithful discipleship is a matter of balance and timing. There are times when the demands of the gospel will require you to be busy serving Christ by serving the Church and serving those in need. And, there are also times you best serve Christ and the world by praying, worshipping, studying, and even by being silent and still and listening for the voice of God. Our challenge is to support one another in discerning when those times are and to avoid either the extreme of ceaseless and meaningless activity or the extreme of unfaithful inaction. Because prayer without service is empty piety, and service without prayer is mere social activism and neither are the gospel of Jesus Christ. The movement of the gospel life is one from prayer, to service, back to prayer.

So, does God want you to be busy? Maybe...sometimes. But God certainly wants you to be faithful and that means being Mary *and* Martha. That means a balanced life of time alone listening intently to Jesus and learning from him, and then rising to serve so that our service resembles the One with whom we have been spending time. That’s the faith which you profess today and the life to which you have been called. May God richly bless you as you spend time with Jesus and then go forth to love and serve in His name. Amen.