

# A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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“We’re a Mess”

Luke 10: 38-42

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Saint Augustine, before he was a saint... was such a mess. And as he dealt in such agony with the meaning of his own life and his longing to know the truth, he reported this... **“I was admonished to return to my own self..”** In other words, some wise soul (Ambrose, I suppose) guided him to look into himself... to go deep within himself and see himself.

This spiritual director knew that if he went there and found his True Self, he would also find God.

Richard Rohr, this Franciscan Priest whom I’ve never met but has meant so much to me, says that ultimately there is no knowledge of self that doesn’t lead to knowledge of God and no knowledge of God that doesn’t lead to knowledge of self. And Richard had probably read Thomas Merton who’d said, “If I find Him I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him.” ;

Maybe you’ll have to chew on it for a while. God... is our deepest reality. God is the deepest truth within each of us... at the heart of who we are. **“He’s closer to me than I am to myself”** is the way the saint said it.

The implication in that teaching is, of course, that we aren’t as close to ourselves as we could be. ... That we are in some ways separate from ourselves... from our inner truth... THE REAL ME... as we sometimes say it. We’re separate from our true self. God isn’t but we are. Disconnected from it and lost to it... and ... we often make a mess of our lives because of it.

We’re controlled by something else other than our source... The Source. We’ve got some egocentric autopilot running our lives and we’re reacting this way and that. Clinging to what we like, resisting what we don’t like. Everything yanking our emotional chains. So many agendas, most of which we can’t name. We’re a mess.

You’ve heard me reference it for years but I’d like to take a moment and spell it out for you... We all have a smaller self. There is that Real Self, that True Self, hidden in God, but there is also this small self. And let me just try to tell you what’s a part of it.

It’s a mixture of a lot of things. Your nature and nurture, to start with. Who you came into the world as and what the world shaped you to be. Your DNA and your momma’s influence.

It’s all that and how you have responded to all that.

Experiences and expectations...

Dispositions and family dynamics...

Roles you chose and some you didn’t.

It’s all that. It’s your personality and our culture. It’s a way of getting by in the world that is unique to you. Your persona ... Some of it conscious, lots of it not. We’re like marionettes often. The culture says “spend money” and the small self says “how much?”

The boss gets fussy and we get scared.

The children get in trouble and we get controlling.

Someone different comes my way and I critique... “He’s worse, she’s better... She belongs, he doesn’t.” See... the small self sort of has a mind of its own. It needs to feel secure and when it doesn’t, it reacts... maybe gets clingy.

Or it needs to be esteemed and someone doesn’t compliment it just so ... and it feels depressed.

It needs to be powerful and so it pushes... maybe knocks people down.

And typically, it does all of this without consulting our better selves... without really knowing a truer self... and without being aware of God. And we make messes because of it.

We are messes... you are... at least some of the time. I know on most days you hide it pretty well. We’re good at that and tend to get along in here and out there. But at some level when I say, “we’re a mess,” you know exactly what I’m talking about.

Particularly, if you’re over 40.

When I was a younger person and I’d read in Romans ole’ Paul going on about how he couldn’t get his life right and then finally he’d confess that he was a “wretch,” my young adult mind was thinking... “Paul, haven’t you read, I’m Okay, You’re Okay? I mean, get some self-esteem, guy... get a life... Wretch? That’s a little over the top, don’t you think?”

Then I got into the second half of life and maybe it’s just me but I saw myself more clearly. “What a mess I am... Who will save me?”

When we live lives disconnected from our source... unaware of God and our very real identity hidden in God... we will make a mess of things.

Oh, we might get along okay out there.

Maybe we’re successful...

Even make a mark and a contribution...

But we’ll probably drive someone crazy in the process. Maybe just ourselves. Maybe we’ll just be a lonely mess. I suspect, though... and as your pastor, let me just say... I know, someone else will suffer from your mess. You can disagree with me... but you’d be wrong. To be unaware of our life in God is to be in a mess.

Martha is a mess. There she is... Mother Immaculate. She’s Aunt Bee on steroids! A self-righteous Martha Stewart. She is **distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.** It’s a great kind of summary line.

She invited her friend Jesus home, and by-god, things are going to be right. Out comes the good china... the best tablecloth. She sends a servant down to the market to buy a fatted calf. She’s in the zone...

Cut flowers...

Hired musicians...

White glove test on the furniture

Her best recipes are out on the counter, including her grandmother’s cinnamon fig pie. She’s into it and it’s her thing... hospitality... her gift and she loves to do it. But Mary has never really cared for it. She was always someplace else... somewhere in her imagination rather than focused on her chores.

And when Mary sits to listen to Jesus, Martha slides predictably into a mess. It’s familiar. **“There she is again... work’s to be done and she’s doing nothing. ... I’m the only one who cares... I carry the load around here. She doesn’t care and apparently, Jesus**

**doesn't either. Comes here... eats my food and lets Mary loaf around. I have a good mind to... I think I will...**

And the mess comes out... it always does... **“Jesus... why don't you tell Mary to get up and help me... Don't you care? Tell her to get off her...”**

Notice all the familiar patterns... The projection... **“I'm feeling terrible and it's her fault.”** Look how she believes she knows Jesus' heart, like she's some sort of psychic... **“You didn't say anything so you must not care.”** She even presumes to tell the Lord what to do... **“Tell her to get up and stir the gravy.”**

Does Martha's melt down feel familiar at all? This isn't her first time... I'm sure. We make the same mess over and over, don't we? Someone pushes that button that's so prominent in us and we start thinking in a certain pattern and before we know it we're captured by this destructive inner dynamic or that one... (passions, the desert fathers called them) and they've got us and the mess inside us spills out.

Into some angry rant...

Or sad withdrawal...

Or malicious gossip...

Obsessive, compulsive worrying.

Self-condemning depression.

You may not be a Martha but you know what it's like to be controlled by the ego... that small self. And it will always be this way if we're operating at that level... always. At this level we will be driven by what we cannot see.

Attached to so many things out there.

Like and dislike, calling the shots.

We can't help ourselves.

**“The things I don't want to do... I keep doing... I keep yelling at Mary when Mary is... well... Mary.”**

Surely, I'm not the only one. And I really don't think you have to be “40 something” to see this... feel it. It will always feel mechanical and uncreative. Repetitive and burdensome. When we're living at this level the energy is thick and sluggish.

People who are like this... stuck here... will always repel. Just pay attention for one week... When we're at this level, only, we're trouble. We're toxic... and I mean that quite literally.

And the world is in trouble because of it... and I mean that quite literally. At the end of the day, our problems, from who's helping in the kitchen to who's running the West Bank, are all... all of them... spiritual. This is where it starts... the mess we make when we aren't in right relationship to our Source.

Jesus invites Martha into that. **“Martha, Martha!”** There's something about repeating a name, huh. It's to get someone's attention... maybe to slow someone down. Luke says that the Lord did it again later with Saul on the road to Damascus... **“Saul... Saul... what are you doing to me?”**

**“Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things.”** Meaning, if we read between the lines and beneath the words, **“This isn't just about who's stirring the gravy. This is about you and your inner life that is always all stirred up.”**

He continues... **“You're so scattered, so divided... only one thing is needed.”**

And then he goes on to imply what it is... And some of you type A's hate this line...  
**“Mary has chosen the better part.”**

And this is one time when being literal can get you in trouble. Jesus is not trying to talk about healthy family systems here. He's not being demeaning of a good work ethic or devaluing certain personality types. In fact, I think after the dinner party, Jesus probably got up and said something like, **“C'mon Mary, let's the two of us do the dishes.”**

This is a spiritual teaching about being with the Lord of Life. ... It's about sitting at the Master's feet for the meal we most need. Knowing the Source and knowing it so well that whether or not the gravy gets scorched doesn't matter.

It's critical that we get this... Being with God is the end game. Being One with God... It's not an accident that Luke says Mary is at the Lord's feet. This is the position of a disciple. A disciple is one entrusted to the teacher. Deeply surrendered. Mary doesn't sit across the table in evaluation of Jesus. Here's the part she's chosen... and it's the way of deep surrender.

Everything... everything becomes a mess when we don't get that right. Even good things get messed up. Things that are good, spiritual disciplines, become legalistic drudgery. Ministry to people, disconnected from this essential relationship, will burn us out.

Good causes will become self-righteous crusades.

Martha's knack for hospitality won't bless her, it'll mess her up inside and tie her in knots and become toxic to her spirit. Even Martha's love for Jesus gets polluted... Martha loves Jesus... really is committed to Jesus... probably talks about Jesus all the time. **“The Lord this and the Lord that....”**

At one level she's converted, huh. But not at the deepest levels of her being... down there she's a mess.

**“Who will save her from that body of death?”**

Thanks be to God, in Christ there's no condemnation... Jesus doesn't say, **“Martha, Martha, shame on you, you stupid stick in the mud.”** No... there's grace in his voice...

**“Martha...”** and an invitation to join Mary there at his feet... at that essential, authentic place... So profound and real, as Jesus says, **“It can't be taken away from her.”**

Once you know this True Self... everything changes, see? Even stirring the gravy.

Our service to the world takes on a more creative and loving quality. Our devotion to Jesus doesn't feel so forced and guilt driven. Mary's not groveling at Jesus' feet... she's enjoying him.

When we live from that true center, “everything belongs.”

**“I was admonished to return to my own self...”** Someone who saw Augustine's deep longing, said to him... **Augustine... Augustine... return to your self... go deep.** And here is how Augustine finished the thought...

**“and with you to guide me, I entered into the innermost part of myself, and was able to do this because you were my helper.”** (Richard Rohr, Everything Belongs, 136)

You are not alone in your search for salvation. All you have to do... all you ever have to do is say yes and the one in whom your real identity has always been hidden will guide you to your true self. Grace will always save you... Thanks be to God.