

Putting ourselves in Martha, Mary, and Jesus' shoes (Luke 10:38-42)

This is a story some of us need to hear in a new way.

by [Kristin Berkey-Abbott](#)

July 19, 2019

To receive these posts by email each Monday, [sign up](#).

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.

In last week's post I talked about the practice of asking "Who am I in this story?" It's a way of trying to hear a story with a beginner's mind.

What might we hear if we were approaching the Mary and Martha story for the first time?

It's a good example of a story some of us need to hear in a new way. We may have had this story presented to us to show us how women should behave, which I don't think is quite what Jesus intended. Nor is it simply a tale of sibling rivalry—although I do think it's a story about the rival forces that compete for each of us.

Here are some questions to help us approach the story from different angles, from the perspectives of different characters.

Where are you Martha?

- What distracts you from the important work that must be done?
- How do you determine which work is important and which work doesn't really matter?

- What work have you turned into an idol?
- If Jesus sat in your living room, how would he direct your attention?
- What anxieties would keep you from paying full attention to Jesus while he was sitting there?
- What anxieties keep you from paying full attention to Jesus when he isn't sitting there?

Where are you Mary?

- What's the important message that sustains you?
- How do you hear God's voice amid the noise of the chores?
- Are you in danger of neglecting the upkeep work that might be necessary?
- Who is doing work so that you have the time to sit with important issues?

- Who needs to hear you say, “Thank you”?

Where are you Jesus?

- What’s the message that others need to hear?
- Who around you simmers with anger and frustration?
- How can you defuse that anger and frustration?
- How can you create meaningful encounters with people who may not be focused on the most important things?