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### FINDING AN M&M BALANCE

For a time, I served a Lutheran church that had a fellowship hall in the basement under the worship center.

- And, near the front of the worship center, there was a large heating vent right above the kitchen.
- Every year, on Easter Sunday, the women of the church would make a delicious Easter breakfast that the congregation could share between worship services.
  - During the first service, though, the smell of that breakfast—eggs, bacon, sausage, and so forth—would come wafting up from the kitchen below.
  - And the noise—voices, pots and pans, dishes—would distract from the worship service.
  - Every Easter, people would come to worship, but couldn't give their full attention to the service because of what was going on in the kitchen.
    - On Easter Sunday, our faith life at this church seemed out of balance.

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We find the same problem in this gospel story—Mary and Martha with conflicting views on how to spend their time.

And I suspect that many of us have the same problem today.

- Think about it: we live in a world that 24/7 is faced with a multitude of options and obligations.
- We constantly seem to be struggling to cram more and more into our lives and many have lost their sense of Sabbath—the need for regular rest and renewal, and time with GOD.

Yet this is contrary to how we were created.

- GOD created human beings on the sixth day, so that our first full day of existence was...? Sabbath.
  - A day to spend with GOD for renewal, relaxation, and to receive whatever GOD has to offer.
  - Today, though, for many, these things have become more of an obligation than a privilege and just one more thing among many to try to juggle into the schedule.
    - Why has this happened?

I think it is a question of identity.

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Let me first say, though, that the church could not get by without Martha and all the other volunteers who give so generously of their time and talents to make sure things happen and happen well.

But regularly we receive the message that our worth comes, not from our status as GOD's children, but from what we have, how we feel, and what we do.

This was, perhaps, the problem for Martha and Mary, the M&M sisters.

- Martha's identity was based on what she did—preparing and serving the meal—and on how her guests felt.
- Mary, however, found her identity in relationship to JESUS.
  - Perhaps, though, this is why our lives might be more Martha-ish.
    - We are deeply focused on what we do rather than who we are.

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What often is the first question asked when to people initially meet?

- “What do you do?”
- How many of us if asked to describe ourselves would talk about the things we’ve done and do?>>Martha answers.
- How many if asked to describe ourselves would say, “Child of GOD?” “Follower of JESUS?” “Believer in the LORD?”>>Mary would.

Certainly, the things we do are important and often have great value.

- But how much do we balance what we do with who we are?
- Is spending time with JESUS a priority to be balanced with the things we do?
- How important do we sense the need to hear from JESUS that we are loved, even treasured by GOD, apart from daily tasks and workloads?
  - And not just for an hour each week, but daily?
  - How might we find an M&M balance?

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Which would be more difficult for you?

- To get up from the feet of the TEACHER to set the table, or to stop the preparations to listen to the word of GOD for a while?
- To miss worship to attend a family event, or to arrive late at a family activity because you attended the worship services of GOD’s house?
- To tell your pastor you can’t come to church for three months because your child has sports practices, or to tell your child’s coach that he or she will miss practice on Sundays so that you can go to worship?
  - (That last one was a difficult struggle when I served in Wisconsin because there was only one hockey rink in town and middle school team practices happened very early in the morning, including on Sundays. I had parents come and tell me they were going to miss worship because of practice, and others that came and said they told their coach that their child would miss Sunday morning practice for church—even if it meant they wouldn’t get to start in the next game.)
  - How you answered these questions may give you an indication of which way you might be off balance.
  - I think finding that M&M balance has to do with asking which is more useful and more needed.

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Take some time today to write down four or five things you most want or need this week.

- Then rank each item on a scale of 1 to 10 as to how important doing or getting that thing is for you.
  - Think about the consequences of not getting it or completing it—both short-term and long-term.
  - You’ll probably have some 7s or 8s, or even 9s.
- Then think about the value you would assign to spending time with GOD, both in worship and in Bible reading and prayer.
  - Think about the importance to you to hear the message that you are loved and that you have meaning, purpose, and value just because of who you are.
  - Also consider how you would rank someone close to you hearing that message—a child, sibling, or close friend.
- Doing this kind of ranking may help you to find more balance between your time of doing and your time of listening to the TEACHER.
  - And you also may find that there are some times when it is needful to be with a dear friend, or at a family reunion, or to take a vacation.

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President Lyndon Johnson once showed up at the home of astronaut John Glenn following Glenn's first space flight.

- Glenn refused to come to the door though this was the President of the United States.
- The reason wasn't political.
- It was because John Glenn's wife, Annie, was extremely ill, and Glenn refused to leave her bedside.
  - That's part of the balance—knowing what is useful and needful.

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Now, I know that the inference from this story is that we need to spend more time with God.

- And just because it's the common implication and focus of this story, and just because I'm a pastor and you probably figure I have to say this, doesn't mean that it isn't true.
  - The odds are pretty good that if we're truly honest with ourselves we will admit that worship in GOD's house and other faith-building activities will mostly or always take a backseat to what we perceive to be more important.
  - There are so many other things that just seem so urgent or necessary—right now.
  - And there is so much that we figure we'll get to when we have the time.
    - But our relationship with GOD, though it's always kind of right there, deserves our attention and cultivation,
      - especially when we recognize that this relationship, which we might also call faith, is the thing that JESUS tells us and promises is the most important thing we can have—in the world—ever!

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And there's an irony to what JESUS has to say to Martha:

- "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about so many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her."
- The reason I say that it is ironic is because JESUS just recently has told HIS disciples that HE is going to Jerusalem where HE will die.
  - Some of HIS disciples will try to convince HIM not to go.
    - Tempting—to hang around with the people who like you and want you to stay with them,
      - to do what is enjoyable or comfortable right now.
    - But JESUS knows what is better, what is more important.
    - Thus, HE will set HIS face for Jerusalem to do that thing that GOD promises will mean so much to all who believe,
      - that thing that, if they have faith and that faith is strong, will not be taken from them.

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Finding an M&M balance begins with asking what is needed of us—by GOD.

- Finding an M&M balance starts with praying, "...not my will, but THY will be done."
- Finding an M&M balance happens when we look at the long-term and not just the immediate.
- Finding an M&M balance comes when we are clear about our priorities for the long-term, for life, and then asking, "How can I best get there,
  - and what do I need to set aside for a time."
- Martha knew what was needed right now.
- Mary, however, chose what was needed for eternity and JESUS promised that it would not be taken from her—ever.