

³⁸ As they went on their way, Jesus came into a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who was sitting at the Lord's feet and was listening to his word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with all her serving. She came over and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me."

⁴¹ The Lord answered and told her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but one thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part, which will not be taken away from her." (EHV)

Theme: The Word is All You Need!

May 31, 1998. That was a big day for me; it was my Confirmation day—I have my confirmation certificate, with my passage: Ephesians 2:8-9, hanging up in my office to remind me of that important day in my life. To tell you the truth, I don't really remember much about that day, I have vague memories of the suit that my parents bought me for the occasion and my confirmation party that afternoon but that's about it. But more important than those things, were the vows that I made.

They are the exact same vows that you'll make in just a few moments—almost 23 years later. Pastor Gartner talked to you about these vows this past Wednesday. And they certainly are important. Not only do you confirm that you are one in faith with your fellow members here at St. John and in the WELS, but you also promise to “intend to continue steadfast in the teaching of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and to endure all things, even death, rather than fall away from it.” And you also will promise to “be faithful in the use of the Word and sacrament, and in faith and action remain true to God, as long as you live.”

Those are big, weighty promises to make. And I believe that you are going to make those promises sincerely—you do certainly intend to remain faithful to the Lord and his Word—you aren't just making these promises because it's expected of you or because your parents are forcing you to do it. No, you sincerely intend to remain faithful, just like those who have gone before you have sincerely made those promises. But year after year, and I warn each class this, about 50% of each class will eventually fall away from the one true faith. Why is that? No one gets confirmed thinking that they will stop coming to worship or that they will stop believing sometime in the future. Yet it happens all the time. Why? Simply put, God's word ceases to be a priority.

Some think that they are the exception to the rule—that they can still believe without ever coming to worship or remaining in God's Word. But without their faith being fed and nourished through the gospel, their faith becomes weaker and weaker until it ceases to be. You think that you can be the exception to the rule, but the countless number of others who have gone before you proves that there are no exceptions. That's why it's important to that God's word not cease to be your number one priority.

But it's all too easy to let happen. Your lives are already busy, and they are about to get busier. There'll be more homework in high school, sports and other extra curriculums will be more demanding of your time and effort, and you'll want to get a job. Then, comes college; and after graduation you'll be working full-time and eventually get married and starting a family. If you

think you are busy now, your life is about to get a whole lot busier! Ask your parents—life isn't going to slow down anytime soon!

You'll have so much on your plate that you'll probably never get it all done, there is always something that you'll have to push off until the next day, or week, or month, or even year. Prioritizing becomes important. And you know what your sinful nature, the world, and the devil will try to convince you of? That the first thing that can be taken off your plate is the study of God's Word and worshipping him. It's all too easy to find some time in your busy schedule by cutting the Lord out of the picture. It's all too easy to let your priorities get all messed up—even when you have the best of intentions.

That's what happened with Martha. Jesus was traveling through Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem, and he was invited by Martha and her sister Mary to come to their home as a guest. They had a big elaborate meal planned for him as an honored guest—rightfully so. It's not too often that the Son of God and the Savior of the entire world makes a stop at your house, so I'm sure they went all-out for this meal.

You know what it's like when an important visitor comes to your house, or you have some sort of large get-together. The place has to be spotless; you break out the fine china, serve the finest wine you have, and you make sure that the meal you planned is perfect. It takes a lot of work and can be stressful. Martha was certainly stressing out. She was running around frantically, checking on the food, setting the table, getting drinks—making sure everything was just right. She certainly could have used help. But the problem was that Jesus was teaching God's Word, and Mary had stopped helping Martha and was instead, listening to Jesus. That just meant more work for Martha, who was growing more and more frustrated that all of the work was falling on her; she was simply too busy, had too much going on to stop and listen to Jesus.

So she complained. **Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me!** I'm sure Mary had plenty to do—Martha had probably made a list for her and told her again and again about everything they had to do. But Mary didn't care; Jesus was preaching and sharing God's Word, so she planted herself at his feet and simply listened to his Word.

Martha complained to Jesus about Mary; but Jesus wasn't about to reprimand Mary for listening to him preach and teach God's Word! Instead, Jesus reprimanded Martha by saying, **Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part.** Mary chose what was better. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to his Word while Martha was running around trying to serve the Lord; and it was Mary, not Martha who was doing what was better.

Think about that. Martha was doing something great—she was serving the Lord; she had opened up her home to him, and was preparing a meal for him. In any other instance nothing would have topped what Martha was doing. However, what Mary was doing was even better. Mary listening to Christ's word was better than Martha serving the Lord. And if that is the case—if listening to the word is better than even serving the Lord, than nothing, absolutely nothing is better than listening to the word of God. Your job, getting chores done, sports, school work, hunting, fishing—the list goes on and on—not as important as listening to God's word!

Now, there are many things we need to live—things like food and water, shelter, clothing, and so on. There are other things that are essentials for us today—indoor plumbing, electricity, a vehicle to get around, and much more. Jesus is not saying that we don't need such things. And there are times when serving someone may be more important than hearing God's Word—for instance if someone were having a heart attack during a worship service here, we'd stop the service while he received medical attention. But that's not Jesus' point, Jesus' point is that in the end, the most important thing in our lives is the word.

Because it is only the word that has the law and the gospel. The word alone tells us that we were conceived and born into sin and completely unable to save ourselves. The world tells us that we aren't that bad by nature and that we can—and must—do something to save ourselves. It is only in the Word that we learn about Jesus and all that he has done for us. Because of the word we know that Jesus is true God from eternity, who became one of us to save us from our sins. Only the word tells us about grace, God's undeserved love for us. Only the word has the message of Christ crucified—and risen from the dead—something that is foolishness to the world.

And it is through the word we are brought to faith and kept in the one true faith; and so through the word we receive all the blessings that Christ won for us and we will live for eternity! Faith receives the forgiveness that Christ won for you in the cross—for it was on the cross that Jesus suffered for each and every one of our sins, even the times that we failed to worship the Lord or study his word because we put things as more important in our lives. Christ has won for you this gift, it is given to you for free; you don't have to do anything to earn it and you certainly don't deserve it! Those who believe in him as their one and only Savior will join him forever. The Holy Spirit is the one who brings us to faith and keeps us in the one true faith; but the Holy Spirit only works through a certain means, and that means is the gospel in word and sacrament. Faith comes from hearing, so if you want to remain in the one true faith and grow in your knowledge of him and his word; you must remain in the word on a regular basis. For when you do the Holy Spirit will do his work and will lead you to eternal life.

So, the word is the one thing needed. Yes, the baptism is necessary for salvation. And God encourages us, and expects us, to partake of his Holy Supper. But the sacraments are nothing without the word. For without the word, as Luther teaches, the earthly elements in the sacraments remain just plain water, bread and wine.

We might need a lot of things to live in this world, but to live eternally, we only need one thing: the Gospel—in word and sacrament. And since our eternal life is far more important than our earthly lives, the Word of God is the one thing we truly need!

May 31, 1998 was a big day for me, just as May 2, 2021 is a big day for you. But truth be told, the day of your confirmation doesn't matter as much as remaining in the one true faith until death—as you make a vow to do! So here on the day of your confirmation, I warn you as your pastor, not to be like others, remain in the word—both here at St. John, and at home. For the word is the one thing needed, the word is the means by which the Holy Spirit leads you to keep your vow, and he keeps you in the one true faith, by which you receive the blessings of salvation. Yes, I say this as your Pastor, because along with Pastor Gartner, we watch over your spiritual lives. But truth be told, in a few months I will no longer be your pastor; and will no longer be responsible for your spiritual life. So, I say this to you and everyone else, not as your pastor, but as a fellow believer: remain in the word, because I want to see you in heaven! Remain in the word—all of it, whenever you can; and whether we see each other again or not, we'll meet again in paradise with our Savior. Amen.