

MARY AND MARTHA: PRAYING AND SERVING

Team time topic talk

Mary and Martha are often used as code words in the church about whether works or faith is the most important habit for Christians to cultivate. This begins in the letters of the New Testament, where we see a tension between the Letter of James, which states 'As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead' (James 2:26) and Paul's assertion in Ephesians 2:8 'You were saved by faith in God, who treats us much better than we deserve. This is God's gift to you, and not anything you have done on your own.'

I see Martha a little bit like Mrs Patmore, the cook in Downton Abbey – a cheerful, busy character who is good hearted, but not blessed with a great deal of insight about how she is sometimes perceived. In contrast, Mary is a more like a languid pre-Raphaelite lady (and I use the word deliberately), who sits around looking dreamy and decorative.

I don't think it's a mistake that they are always mentioned together, because they are not complete characters in themselves. We know almost nothing about them, apart from their actions. We are also not really sure if they appear elsewhere in the Bible – it could be they are the sisters of Lazarus who are mentioned in John 11, but this may be a coincidence. John may be talking about two other sisters with the same names.

It is more instructive to look where Mary and Martha fall in Luke's narrative. Their story falls between the Good Samaritan – a parable which praises good works – and Jesus teaching us about prayer. If we take these three pieces of scripture together, we see something different. Works and faith are part of the same story. We need to discern God's will, and then act on it. In this way, we are helping the Kingdom Come, just as we say

as we echo the prayer that Jesus gave us as he spoke about prayer to the disciples of his time.

- What are you better at: prayer, reflection or action? How can you balance this out in your own life?
- In our noisy, frenetic society, we do not really value making time to sit and take stock or be thoughtful in our choices about what we do. How can we cultivate and preach a more balanced life in Church, and out of it?
- Mary and Martha are both right, and yet both wrong at the same time. How can we communicate with others who have different priorities to us in our local churches?

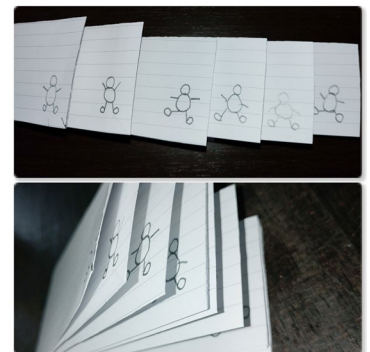
Take some time to pray together, and ask God to help you discern when to listen and be still, and when to act and to serve. In the business of running a holiday club, it can be difficult to take time to sit and listen, and yet this is often what children need. Ask God to speak to you, and give you both patience and energy for the session ahead and to speak to the children and families, too, through the activities you have planned.

Detectives' den

Arrival activity

Create a flicker book and dot-to-dot or colouring.

Cut six pieces of paper or card, and fold them into a booklet. You need to be precise when cutting the paper, as they must all be even. In the corner of each page, draw a simple image.



Every page should have the same image in a slightly different position, so that it appears to move when flicked through, like Martha running around doing lots of things to cater for Jesus.

Dot-to-dot or mindfulness colouring on the theme of praying to encourage stillness, like Mary sitting and simply being with Jesus.

Case file update

For activities, see urc.org.uk/holiday-club

Detective briefing

Mary and Martha: Praying and serving Mary and Martha Panto (Luke 10:38-42)

This skit is in pantomime style, so have fun with it, and really ham it up!

Scene: A living room and kitchen. There are pots on the stove, and dirty plates on the table. Mary is sitting on the sofa, reading. Martha comes running in through the front door.

Martha: Quick! Mary, quick! I've just met Jesus and his friends down at the square and they're coming back for dinner. (Martha stops and stares). What...what is this mess? You haven't washed the plates or pots, or dusted, or hoovered... have you just been sitting there this whole time?

Mary: (Looking guilty) Err, no, of course I haven't. I've been very busy.

Martha: Doing what? Keeping the seat warm? (Martha flounces through to the kitchen and puts on an apron)

Mary: (Sighs) No! (Looks at audience and nods and winks)

Martha: You're so lazy. (Looks at the audience) Isn't Mary lazy?

Mary: Oh no I'm not!

Audience: Oh yes you are.

Mary: Oh no I'm not!

Audience: Oh yes you are.

Mary: Oh I'm...

Martha: Enough of this malarkey (Martha passes a broom to Mary). Quick! Get the floor swept, tidy up. They'll be here soon. Oh my, there's so much to do.

(Martha starts frantically washing dishes. Mary starts to sweep the floor, but gets distracted and starts singing and dancing with the broom.)

Martha: MARY!!

(There's a knock at the door. Mary and Martha get flustered. Martha rushes into the kitchen and starts preparing drinks. Mary hides the broom behind the sofa, and answers the door.)

Mary: Hello Jesus! Hello others. Welcome. Please come in and take a seat.

[Place Jesus by the front door and disciples closer to the kitchen door].

(Jesus enters and sits down but when his friends start to enter, Mary stops them and points at the doormat.)

Mary: Wipe your feet please, I've spent ages cleaning this house.

(Everyone takes a seat, and Mary sits down on the floor next to Jesus, listening to him talking. Martha walks through with a tray of drinks and biscuits and hands it to Mary.)

Mary: Oooh lovely. I'm so thirsty and hungry after all the cleaning.

Martha: It's not for you! You're supposed to serve the drinks and biscuits to our guests.

Mary: (Through a mouthful of biscuit) I can't. My hands are full and I'm kinda busy here. Ssssh Martha, we can't hear Jesus over your huffing.



(Martha serves the drinks and biscuits, mumbling to herself about how lazy her sister is. She stomps back into the kitchen, glaring at Mary.)

Martha: Oh my, so much to do. I need to serve the cake, get more drinks, boil the potatoes, prepare the veg, roast the chicken, warm the plates, set the table, and look at her! Sat there like the Queen of Sheba. Well she can get off her lazy behind and help. She can cut and serve the cake so I can get on. But how to do it without interrupting Jesus again.

(Stage whisper)

Pssst.....psssst Mary.....PSSSSST!

(Mary glances over to Martha. Martha begins miming cutting the cake, serving it, and eating it. Mary looks confused. Martha's mime becomes more elaborate. Mary looks at the audience, makes a 'she's mad' mime to them, shrugs and goes back to Jesus.)

Martha: Aaaargh.

(Martha peeks through the door and then begins crawling around the back of the chairs towards Mary. Occasionally, Martha pops her head up, she finds the broom and with it, continues crawling to Mary. When Martha has crawled around Jesus, she pokes Mary in the side with the broom. Mary screams and accidentally throws her drink [make sure it's water] over Martha. Martha shrieks and Jesus leans over the side of the chair and peers at her.)

Jesus: Martha! Oh no, you're all wet. What were you doing down there? Are you OK?

Martha: No, I'm not! I really wanted to see you today and speak with you, but I'm so busy in the kitchen getting everything prepared while lazybones here (prods Mary) just sits here and does nothing to help me. Tell her Jesus! Tell her to stop being so lazy and to help me!

Mary: I'M NOT LAZY!

Martha and audience: Oh yes you are!
(Do this a few times in panto fashion).

Jesus: Ladies! Come now, enough of this. Martha come and sit down. (Martha begins protesting as Jesus leads her to a chair). Martha, hush. Sometimes, we have to work out what's really important, and make sure that we do the really important thing. Mary knows that it is very important to listen to me, to hear about God and all the wonders in this world.

Martha: But Jesus, the food! It's important too. It won't cook itself, and we're supposed to have dinner together. I can't just sit around; nothing will get done.

Jesus: My dearest Martha. It's so lovely that you're worried about feeding me, about making sure that I get a fantastic dinner, but what would you rather do? What do you think is more important? Cooking the food or coming and talking with me?

Martha: Well, obviously, I'd rather be with you. I invited you here, and I want to spend time with you. But....

Jesus: No buts, Martha. For today, follow Mary's example. It's more important for you and me to spend time together, so do that. Don't worry about the food. Peter has the local takeaway on speed dial, so we'll all still eat. Do what is important, sit, relax and let's enjoy each other's company. (While Jesus is talking, Mary can be getting Martha a drink, the disciples can be putting a stool under her feet. Everyone sits down.)

Bible verse: James 4:8 'Come near to God, and God will come near to you.'



Video

Animation by Crossroads Kids www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQGKLA4AfXs



Detectives investigate

Games: Mary and Martha, Jesus is coming

A group leader shouts out the commands.

All the players line up single file. Introduce the various commands and actions to be used in the game: run in; run out; run here; run there; pray (fall to your knees like you are praying); clean the windows; listen to Jesus; cook the dinner; sweep the floor; be still like a statue; do the ironing; sit down; Mary (everyone sits down); Martha (everyone runs around).

When you are ready for play to commence, the players do the action associated with the command.

Play continues with the leader calling and the players responding. The faster the actions are called and performed, the trickier (and funnier) the game becomes.

Craft: Egg timer

You will need:

- Two small clean and dry plastic bottles with flat-top lids
- Glue
- Strong tape
- Fine sand or salt



What you do:

Make a hole in the lid of one of the bottles using a sharp point (an adult will need to help with this).

Remove the lid of the other bottle, and join the two lids together with glue and tape, then make the hole go through both lids, and make it bigger using a screwdriver or big nail. The hole needs to be big enough to get a good flow of sand through it. You may need to experiment with it.

Fill one bottle half-way with play sand or salt, screw the lids onto this bottle, and then screw the other bottle in place. Secure the bottles together using strong tape.

Watch the sand flow through and be like Mary sitting still, while the sand is like Martha rushing through the timer.

Reflection

We may do things differently and think about things in different ways, but we can all work better for Jesus if we combine our thinking and doing together to make our families happy and safe places to be.

- Who likes to do?
- Who likes to think?

Small group prayer activity

Make a glitter jar. Fill a screw-top jam jar or bottle a third full of clear glue or glitter glue. Add a small amount of blue food colouring. Add a tablespoon of glitter or table confetti, and fill the jar with warm water to help it mix with the glue. Put the top on the jar and screw the lid tightly, then shake well to mix all the ingredients. Your glitter jar is now ready to use. Find a space to sit comfortably and place your jar where you can see it. Shake the jar and sit and watch as the glitter falls. Sometimes we are busy, busy, busy doing things to serve God in our world, but sometimes it is good just to sit and listen to God.



Recipe: Double decker sandwiches

Ingredients

- Bread (gluten free)
- Butter/margarine
- Fillings including (but not limited to!)
 - Peanut butter
 - Jam
 - Cheese
 - Sliced ham
 - Tomato
 - Egg
 - Fairtrade chocolate spread
 - Honey

Directions

Give the children three slices of bread each. Get them to make one sandwich, selecting one of the fillings which they think could represent Martha or being busy/doing things. Once this is completed, get them to add another layer of filling to the top of the sandwich, this time thinking of something that could represent Mary or being still. Cover it with the third slice of bread.

Detective update

Interviewing the suspect:

MG interviews Mary and Martha

MG: Oi! Hello, who are you two then?

M and M: I'm Mary, and I'm Martha. We are sisters. Who are you?

MG: I ask the questions round here! You looked like you were bickering, what's your story then?

Martha: I was telling her that she needs to help more around the house.

Mary: And I was telling her that she needs to learn how to stop once in a while and be there for people.

MG: Which one of you is right then?

Martha: Well, I think I am. If someone comes to your house, you should look after



them, clean the house, make the food, give them a drink... so much to do.

Mary: And I was saying you need to spend time with them, talk, catch up, and listen to them.

MG: So which one is right, then?

Martha: I am

Mary: No, I am!

MG: Who is coming to visit you?

Martha: Oh, it's very special. It's Jesus. He's a very important person.

Mary: And a very good friend.

MG: Why is he coming to your house?

Martha: He often comes to visit. He knows we will look after him.

Mary: He knows he is welcome in our house; it gives him a chance to get away from the crowds, a safe place, with friends.

MG: Now I can see, I know who you are. You're one of us!



Song



Hints are everywhere we look as we investigate this book
We must search to see if we can find the truths
With a magnifying glass, and the right amount of sass
We will be a group of modern supersleuths

There was Mary, there was Martha in their home
One was working, one was praying all alone
Both things needed to be done, but it doesn't sound much fun
But they knew that very soon they would be welcoming God's son

Interviewing the detectives

MG asks questions of the detectives or holds a quiz to find out what they've learned and what conclusions they've come to.

Closing prayer



Children stand a little apart from each other. At AMEN, children wave their hands; dance, make noise or move however they like (Frenzy). When they hear the word Jesus, they stop and listen. At the final Amen, the children cheer.

Martha liked to do things and Mary liked to think. Thank you, God, for all those people we know who are like Mary and Martha AMEN. **Frenzy**

Jesus, we thank you for all the people who do good in the world. We now think of someone we know who helps make other people happy. **Silence**

Thank you for those special people AMEN. **Frenzy**

Jesus, we thank you for all the people who are brainy and think of ways that make other people's lives easier. We think of someone we know who helps other people. **Silence**

Thank you for those special people AMEN. **Frenzy**

Jesus, we thank you for all the people who have worked so hard to keep us safe over the past year. We think of someone we know who is a doctor, nurse, works in a shop or has looked after someone. **Silence**

Thank you for those special people AMEN. **Frenzy**

Jesus, we thank you for all the people who are helping us learn and grow, our teachers and schools, our families, our church, the groups we belong to. We think of someone we know who has taught us something important. **Silence**

Thank you for those special people AMEN. **Frenzy**

Jesus, we ask you to help us be a little bit like both Mary and Martha. Help us to do our best to show people your love in all we think and do. **Amen (cheer)**

