



## Mary & Martha

by Lauren Wright Pittman  
Inspired by Luke 10:38-42  
*Digital painting*

Growing up, I felt I had to decide whether I was a Mary or a Martha. I never identified with Martha because the culturally-prescribed roles of a woman were my weakness, and I didn't identify with Mary either because she seemed more earnest than I felt.

Diving into the Greek of this text helped me work through my very well-worn opinions to find some nuance. Martha's work was not limited to cooking and cleaning; the Greek word used for her many tasks is διακονία which also means "service, ministering, and promoting religion."<sup>3</sup> With this layered meaning in mind, it is clear to me that Jesus' response is not about Martha's ministry, but her preoccupation with Mary.

I think the most pivotal shift in translation is found in v. 42 where it is often translated, "Mary has chosen the better part." When you

look at the Greek, however, it can also be translated as, "a good portion" or "a useful share."<sup>4</sup> In light of this, I believe Jesus is not offering a value judgment between them, but assuaging Martha's worry by affirming that Mary is doing a good portion of the work too.

Mary sits at the feet of Jesus, a place that was reserved for men. I wonder if Martha was concerned about what might happen to Mary for being out of "her place." Jesus' response is radical because he affirms she has chosen a good portion of the work, and even though she is not where she is expected to be, no one can take that away from her. Jesus protects her right to assume the position of a disciple.

In this image, Mary eagerly reaches toward Jesus. Her clothing is patterned with mustard seeds and flowers because her faith may seem small, but her boundary-breaking faithfulness will nurture her faith to grow beyond what seems possible. Martha reaches toward Mary to pull her into more "appropriate" work. Martha's dress is patterned with open hands to image her vital ministry of welcome, service, and cultivating space for Jesus' message to take root. I imaged Jesus equally affirming both Mary and Martha's lived-out faiths. He is green, the combination of Mary and Martha's colors (yellow + blue), showing that he embodies the integration of both faith and works. —Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

<sup>3</sup> [blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1248/kjv/tr/0-1/](https://blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1248/kjv/tr/0-1/)

<sup>4</sup> Strong's Greek Lexicon, G18 and G3310.



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**“HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE” SPEAKER SERIES**

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## **RACIAL JUSTICE IN A POST – GEORGE FLOYD WORLD**



**WITH ANITA FRIDAY  
OF THE OPEN HEARTS  
FOUNDATION**

**Sunday, March 23, 2025  
7PM on Zoom**

<https://tinyurl.com/AnitaFriday>

Anita is the founder of Open Hearts: A Path for Racial Healing ([openheartsapathforracialhealing.com](https://openheartsapathforracialhealing.com)). Its mission is to dismantle racial inequity through education, training, and engagement, and to provide tools for one to use in order to move America towards an ethically-based society where everyone, irrespective of race or ethnicity, has the opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.

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