

EXEMPLARY CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP MARY OF BETHANY: A WOMAN OF INFLUENCE

Narrator's Introduction:

The Women's Leadership Institute (WLI) at Concordia University Wisconsin is a lay institute that seeks to educate, encourage and equip women for exemplary Christian leadership in the home, church, workplace and world.

One of WLI's strategic objectives is "...to encourage research and thoughtful discussion by exploring the biblical and historical record of the service of women."

This presentation today addresses that objective.

We will review two short scenes in the New Testament. The accounts are blended from those found in the gospels in three translations: the NIV, GW (God's Word), ESV. Jesus, in both scenes, interacts with one woman, especially – Mary of Bethany. Other actors in the scenes are the onlookers. They have something to say, too. And they have much to learn.

We will look at the text this way: we invite you to look and listen instead of read. You might think of the presentation of these two short scenes as readers' theater where a Greek Chorus tells the story with the help of a couple of other characters. The chorus guides the narrative, explains what's happening, and adds information.

Once we have explored the text, we will talk over what we've seen and heard and think together how this applies to who we are and what we do as women of influence.

So...Let's raise the curtain.

Drama:

Participants:

Chorus Leader: **A** _____ (**Steps one step forward when speaking line, then back in place**)

Chorus: **B** _____
C _____

Speaking Jesus' words: _____

Mary Pantomime: _____ (comes forward from audience)

Martha's Complaint: _____ (rises from the audience)

Narrator's Introduction and Discussion _____

Words of Scripture are italicized.

Scene One
Luke 10:38-42

A *As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, traveling along, they came to a village.*

ABC Bethany, it was... (unison, where multiples indicated)

B *There, a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.*

C *She had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.*

A To sit at the feet of a rabbi was to be a learner.
Most rabbis would never accept a woman as a disciple.
A woman in this position was startling in a culture
where women did not receive formal teaching.
Both Mary and Jesus were behaving outside the lines.

Mary will speak not one word...
Yet her **choice** speaks louder than **any** words.

C *Martha was distracted by all the preparations...*
Upset by all the work she had to do...

(B and C reflecting with one another)

B No wonder!
Think of housing and feeding more than 10 overnight guests!
With no modern conveniences.

C She probably ground all the flour the night before.

B So that very early the next morning, she could sieve the flour,
mix it with water and olive oil.

C Even earlier she had drawn gallons of water
for the family and the guests...

B ... and the animals.

C Now she added a handful of the sourdough from yesterday's
baking and shaped the dough into round, flat loaves and left
them in the sun to rise.

B She gathered fuel and lit the fire in the courtyard.

C She may have had help slaughtering the goat
and dressing it for roasting...

B ...but maybe not.

C Anyway, it was probably already roasting slowly on the spit

over the open fire when Jesus and the disciples arrived.

B She had to keep an eye on it, though, and remember to turn it every so often so it wouldn't burn.

C And then there were the lentils to shell and get to cooking...

B She made yogurt and got out the cheese...

C There were the pomegranates and figs and dates to serve...

(Picking up speed as they converse)

B And olives pickled in brine...

C And the bread to bake as soon as it was ready...

B And the wine to mix with water...

C And the bowls to set out and the mats to stretch out on the floor...

B And the lamps to light...

C And then she could smell the goat burning!

B This to-do list just never ended...

C And she only had two hands!

BC Where was her sister? Where was Mary?

A *Almost in tears,
Martha came up to Jesus and asked,*

(Martha rises from the audience and speaks.)

Martha *“Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work **all by myself**? Tell her to help me.”*

B Tell her to help me.

C Tell her to help me.

Jesus said: (lovingly)
“Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset,

Anxious and troubled about many things.

There is only one thing you need.

Mary has made the right choice.

Mary has chosen what is better.

*And it will **not** be taken away from her.”* (Martha sits.)

A Mary,
Leading by influence:

Everyone who was there,
in the house,
at the meal,
saw it!...her choice to sit and listen and learn
in favor of domestic duties.

Through her example:
Mary leads Martha,
She leads the male disciples,
to understand what needs to come first.
Hungering for learning so we might be equipped
to share the love of Jesus effectively is critical.
Her leadership remains an example for us all.

She did what she could. And Jesus approved.
Exemplary Leadership

Scene Two
Mark 14:3-9 John 12:1-8 Matthew 26:6-13

A *A few days before Passover
Jesus was in Bethany where Lazarus lived.*

ABC You remember!

B *Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead.*

A *So they gave a dinner in Jesus' honor
at the house of a man known as Simon the Leper.*

C *Martha served. And Lazarus was one of those eating with
Jesus.*

ABC (forceful) Then...an interruption!

A *A woman, Lazarus' sister, Mary,
came to Jesus with an alabaster flask of very expensive
ointment,*

(Mary steps forward, holding up the jar with both hands. Freezes.
Head up.)

B *made from pure Nard...pistic nard...made from oil extracted
from
a plant grown in India.
It was often used for burial rites.*

C *Nard was very costly.*

A *Where would she get such a treasure?
Was it her dowry? The family's nest egg?*

B *Mary broke the flask
and emptied it over Jesus' head,*

(Mary turns the jar over – upside down.)

- C his shoulders,
- B and his feet.
- A She spent it all ... on Jesus.
- C *Then, Mary knelt down and wiped Jesus' feet with her hair.*

(Mary kneels. Head bowed. Freezes.)

- A Her unbound hair...
It is an act of humility.
It was a servant's role to attend to feet.
And diners often wiped their hands
on a servant's hair during a meal.
- B *The house was **filled** with the fragrance of the perfume.*
- C *When the disciples saw it
they were **indignant!***
- A In the translation from the Greek,
They "**snorted, as a horse.**"

ABC Huh! (repeated)

(Continuing among themselves)

- B *Why this **waste**?*
- C *Why this waste of **perfume**?*
- B *Why did she **waste** it like this?*
- C *This ointment could have been sold for more than a year's
wages
and the money given to the poor!*
- A *They scolded Mary.
They rebuked her harshly.*

They said some very unkind things to her.

Jesus said: *Leave her alone! (Mary rises.)
Why are you bothering her?
She has done a beautiful thing for me.*

*The poor you will always have with you
and you can help them any time you want.
But you will not always have me.*

She did what she could.

ABC *She did what she could.*

*In pouring this ointment on my body,
She has done it to prepare me for my burial.*

*I tell you the truth,
wherever the gospel is preached,
throughout the world,
What she has done will also be told in memory of her.*

A Mary,
Leading by influence:

Everyone who was there,
in the house,
at the meal,
saw it!her fervent love for Jesus and desire to serve him
as best she could,
her choice to spend it all,
her conviction that Jesus meant it
when he told them he would truly die.

Mary leads the onlookers,
the disciples and others,
to understand who he was,
and what he would do for love of them.

Her leadership remains an example for us all.

She did what she could. And Jesus approved.

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(end)

Discussion Guide

Scene One: Luke 10:38-40

1. Jesus told Martha that Mary had chosen the better “meal”. What do you think happened next?
2. In what sense did Mary take the initiative in learning from Jesus? Did Jesus *invite* her to sit down? What might have given Mary courage to sit instead of scurry?
3. What did Mary learn at Jesus’ feet? Think of as many “truths” as you can.
4. What opportunities do women today have to sit at Jesus’ feet and learn from him?
5. How does your Christian community offer opportunities to support and encourage women who desire opportunities to grow spiritually, intellectually, and practically in service to Christ? Are you aware how WLI offers these opportunities? What could you do to encourage women to grow?

Scene Two: Mark 14:3-9 John 12:1-8 Matthew 26:6-13

1. What do you think happened next in these accounts
 - after Jesus told the onlookers to leave Mary alone?
 - after Jesus said you and I would retell and remember what Mary had done?
2. In what sense has the sweet smell of Mary’s loving act “filled the whole house?”
3. Exerting influence often takes great courage even in familiar settings. How does leading by influence require both conviction and courage?
4. Tell about a time when you found the courage to influence others by your words or action.
5. In both accounts Mary’s choice, her deliberate act, went against convention. She made up her mind and acted on faith. She stayed **focused on Jesus**. Through her witness, her family and friends, and Jesus’ inner circle, too, could see Jesus more clearly. Why does Jesus support her witness?

About the author: Donna Streufert is a teacher and writer. Beginning in 1969, she wrote religion curriculum and adult Bible studies for Concordia Publishing House, including four LifeLight studies. Currently, she writes for Creative Communications for the Parish in Fenton, Missouri. In 2003, Donna and her husband Daniel founded the Women's Leadership Institute at Concordia University Wisconsin, where she taught as an adjunct instructor in education for five years and served on the Board of Regents for twelve years