

“Martha, Mary and life’s priorities”

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Dear Friends,

The theme for this Local Arrangement service is “Martha, Mary and life’s priorities”.

Please feel free to 'customize' your service to your own congregation... e.g. instead of the quotations about being busy on page 3, perhaps there is a member of your congregation who could reflect either on changing their life in response to a call from God, or on how changes forced upon them (by circumstances or health) have enabled them to draw nearer to God. The hymns, too, are only suggestions - if your congregation knows others that fit in with the theme, especially any newer ones, please use those. This is *your* service of worship to God.

I have suggested that you use 2 leaders and 4 readers, but you can adjust this too!

Chris Odell (Sheasby)

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Call to Worship: Leader 1

There is a time for work, a time for rest, a time for play.
This is our time to worship God,
To come together in praise and prayer.
This is our time to worship God,
So we may work for him, rest in him,
And enjoy the life he gives us.

Please be seated to listen to our first Bible Reading...

Old Testament Reading 1: Reader 1 – Exodus 20:8-11

HYMN – This is the day that the Lord has made *StF 152; H&P 578; MP 691 And/OR*
Come, now is the time to worship.... *StF24; MP 1040*

Prayer of Adoration: Leader 2

In our prayer of praise we remember all that God,
whose special day and time this is, has done for us. Let us pray...
Creator God,
For making the world to be our home;
For making us in your image, to love and serve you;
For calling us to be stewards of your creation:
We praise and thank you.

Saving God,
For coming to live our human life among us;
For coming to break through the barriers of sin;
For calling us to share your forgiving love with all:
We praise and thank you.

Empowering God,
For filling us with love and joy and peace;
For filling us with courage and strength;
For calling us to live and serve you boldly:
We praise and thank you. In the name of the Way, the Truth and the Life, **Amen.**

Introduction to the theme of the service: Leader 1

We hear a lot of talk these days about ‘hard-working families’ and also about the work/life balance. We are aware that many members of our society (the ‘just about managing’ that the Prime Minister has referred to) have a daily struggle to keep going. We know, too, that many people live with constant stress and feelings of dissatisfaction and that relationships are suffering because loved ones cannot find time to be together. Christians are not immune to such pressures, both in their personal lives and also in their busy church lives, where there are always jobs to be done. Are we too busy, or too afraid, to stop and ask that most basic of questions – ‘What is life all about?’ Listen to a story you’ll know well, that asks that question...

New Testament Reading 1: Reader 2 – Luke 10 v 38 – 42

Introduction to OT2 reading: Leader 1

‘Just one thing is needed’ But what is that one thing? The writer of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher, possibly one of the Kings of Israel, would have been seen by his contemporaries as a hard-working and successful man. He was rich. He was clever.

But in his writings he acknowledges that there is something essential missing from his life. We now hear a reading in which he agonises over the true meaning of life – be prepared to feel depressed!

Old Testament Reading 2: Reader 3 – Ecclesiastes 2 v 11 - 26

Meditation and Prayer of Confession: Leader 2

'It is like chasing the wind'. We have all felt like that at times – too busy to get the best out of life, and wondering what we've really achieved.

We now think about that busyness in a meditation that is also our prayer of confession:

Let us pray:

Being busy, getting things done – sometimes, Lord, I give it too much importance:

I spend too much time doing, not being,

To the detriment of my relationships, my well-being, my spiritual growth;

Sometimes I put too much emphasis on work,

Asking people what they do, or used to do, rather than finding out who they are;

Sometimes I eat myself up with worry about all I have to do

And lose my perspective on life, lose all sense of enjoyment.

Lord, help us to see that being busy should not always come first.

Help us to get our priorities right.

Being busy, getting things done – sometimes, Lord, I give it too little importance:

I give too little thought to those unable to do much, to their feelings and problems;

I put too little of myself into what I do and so derive no satisfaction from helping others;

I put too little of you, Lord, into my daily life, remaining content to be a Sunday Christian.

Lord, help us to see that our labour enriches human life, and that all we do should be done for you.

Forgive our self-centredness and lack of wisdom in the way we live our lives, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to show us what true human life can be. **Amen.**

HYMN: How blest is life if lived for thee.... *H&P 421 OR*

All I once held dear *StF 489; MP 799*

Introduction to Martha & Mary Sketch: Leader 1

The story of Martha and Mary is one we know well. But with whom in the story do you identify most? Listen to the story from their different points of view....

Sketch: Readers 4 and 1

Martha: I was so excited, I hadn't slept. Jesus, the Teacher and Healer, was coming to our house. But from the very start, things went wrong. The bread didn't rise. The wine was rancid. I couldn't get the water to boil for the eggs. And there was so much to do! The cooking, the cleaning, the tidying. I was that frazzled! And did that young sister of mine raise a finger to help? Did she heck! She was the baby of the family and Mum spoilt her rotten. Doesn't she realise that if she wants to follow Jesus, he'll expect her to be a bit more helpful and loving? She looks at him as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, but I shall tell him what she's *really* like.

Mary: I was so excited, I hadn't slept. This would be my chance to get close to Jesus. He was always surrounded by so many people. I would be able to hear what he had to say and perhaps even ask him questions. But by the time he arrived, Martha was in a terrible state. She so much wanted everything to be perfect for his visit. I know I should have helped more, but would I have done it right for her? And how could I pass up the opportunity to sit at Jesus's feet and listen to him? I'm not sure if there'll be another. Jesus was so pleased that I listened to him and sad that what could have been a happy time for Martha had been spoilt by her fussing and fretting.

Comment: Leader 1

We will spend a few moments now sharing with those sitting near us. Who do you identify with, in that story, Martha, Mary, or both? Does it have a special message for you or your church?

Sharing

We now listen to a reading from the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus tells us how we should live our lives....

New Testament Reading 2: Reader 2 - Matthew 6 v 23 - 33

Offering and Prayer: Leader 2

We cannot earn your love, saving God,
as this money has been earned.

We cannot earn your love,
but we can thank you for giving it to us
by offering you everything we have and are.

In the name of Jesus Christ, who gave his very life for us, **Amen**

HYMN: Seek ye first the kingdom of God....*StF254; H&P 138; MP 590*

Comment on 'Getting our priorities right': Leader 1

'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you.'

That is the message of Martha and Mary – get it right with God first, and you will find love and meaning, joy and hope in your life. As church going Christians, our lives can be very full and busy doing good things, but we need to ask ourselves:

Am I too busy to pray? *Pause between each question*

Am I too busy to think things through?

Am I too busy to listen to God?

Am I too busy to listen to others?

Am I too busy to find peace and joy?

Reflection – Quotations about being busy: Reader 2

From the Wall Street Journal (*altered*): "Instead of saying "I don't have time" try saying "it's not a priority," and see how that feels. Often, that's a perfectly adequate explanation. I have time to iron my sheets, I just don't want to. But other things are harder. Try it: "I haven't time to play with you, because it's not a priority." "I don't have time to go to the doctor because my health is not a priority."

If these phrases don't sit well with you, that's the point. Changing our language reminds us that time is a choice. If we don't like how we're spending an hour, we can choose differently."

From Mother Teresa's book, 'The Joy in Loving; a Guide to Daily Living':

"Never be so busy as not to think of others."

From Lin Yutang's book, 'The Importance of Living':

"Those who are wise won't be busy, and those who are too busy can't be wise."

New Testament Reading 3: Reader 3 1 Corinthians 13 v 1 - 3

HYMN: Come down, O Love divine....*StF 372; H&P 281; MP 89*

Prayers of Intercession: Leader 2

In this prayer, there is a response – God of our lives: **help us to put your kingdom first.**

Creator God, your world is a busy place;
Its leaders fret and fuss about so many things.

Creator God, teach them the things that are necessary:

justice for the oppressed and exploited;
compassion for the hungry and destitute;
peace between individuals, communities and nations.

We pray that they may choose what is best.

God of our lives: **help us to put your kingdom first.**

Saviour God, many people live very busy lives,
They fret and fuss about so many things.

Saviour God, teach them the things that are necessary:

healthy and loving relationships;
purpose and spiritual depth in life;
caring for those who need comfort and help.

We pray that they may choose what is best.

God of our lives: **help us to put your kingdom first.**

Spirit of God, your church is a busy community,
Fretting and fussing about so many things.

Spirit of God, teach your church the things that are necessary:

a joyful and obedient faith in you;
unity in love for one another;
self-giving love for your world.

We pray that your church may choose what is best.

God of our lives: **help us to put your kingdom first.**

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Teacher and Saviour, **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: Leader 2

Reflection: Reader 4 – a well-known version of the 23rd Psalm written by a Japanese woman.

The Lord is my Pace Setter, I shall not rush,

He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals,

He provides me with images of stillness, which restore my serenity.

He leads me in ways of efficiency, through calmness of mind; and his guidance is peace.

Even though I have a great many things to accomplish each day,

I will not fret, for his presence is here.

His timelessness, his all-importance will keep me in balance.

He prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of my activity,

By anointing my head with his oils of tranquillity, my cup of joyous energy overflows.

Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruit of my hours,

For I shall walk in the pace of my Lord, and dwell in his house for ever.

HYMN: Dear Lord and Father of mankind....*StF 495; H&P 673; MP 111*

Blessing: Leader 2

Let us go out into the world in peace and joy,

Our lives made whole by God's Word of saving love,

Our hearts overflowing with his compassion for others,

Our minds and bodies ready to serve him when he calls.

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

rest upon each one of us, now and evermore. **Amen.**