

Making a Mary

It is not easy to stop acting like Martha, and find the "good part" that Mary had found at the feet of Jesus. There is something comforting in tasks and activities that make us feel we have accomplished something worthwhile, have finished something that needed to get done, or created something that is pleasing or fulfilling.

In Christian service, this is very true. I sometimes think that we go through "wilderness experiences" so that the outward things of life do not make us feel that all is well without a real fellowship with God. It seemed that the men whom God was going to use in a significant way, throughout the Bible, each went through extended periods of outward fruitlessness, loneliness, or frustration, during which the Lord worked deep lessons into their lives. What about Abraham and Sarah, through the twenty five years of waiting, before the promise of Isaac was fulfilled? How about Jacob, the conniver, who lived with Laban another conniver, spending there twenty years of his life, none of which added up to useful service for the Lord, but through which he was finally transformed into a servant of God, climaxed on the night of his wrestling with the angel?

I sometimes wonder if the Lord has us in a place for a long time, waiting for us to stop our anxious activity and listen to Him -- but we don't get the point very soon. And the time goes on, until a secret matter of the heart is dealt with, making us ready for the release of God's blessing, be it our Isaac, or a change in our very identity like Jacob that night. He received a new name, Israel -- overcomer. To change from conniver to overcomer is no smaller miracle than a promised son coming to parents beyond child bearing years. The greatest miracle may be the inward change of character.

To transform a Martha into a Mary takes a miracle. To come to the place of listening to the Lord, letting Him say what He wants, and abiding in that word -- that is a miracle of transformation. Can a leopard change its spots? No less impossible is it for a man to change from a life of good works to a life lived in the abiding presence and grace of God. Everything within us seems to resist it; it is the essence of salvation, the nature of redemption, to become a receiver from God, an abider in Christ, a feeder from His word, a man who lives "by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." To come to the place of being "crucified with Christ", nevertheless alive -- yet not of my own life, but the life of Christ living through me.

John Matthews