

Martha



Luke 10:38-42

Year C Proper 11

copyright © 2014

Freeman Ng

www.AuthorFreeman.com

Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3
■	Martha - an extremely competent, no-nonsense woman hosting Jesus and the disciples in her home	▲	▲	■
▲	Mary - Martha's sister (will be called simply Mary in this play)	▲	▲	●
■	Eli - an old widower living down the street from Martha		■	
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)		▲	▲
●	Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor		●	
▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence		▲	
▲	Andrew - one of the youngest disciples		▲	
▲	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus		▲	
●	Mary Magdalene - Mary Magdalene the disciple (as opposed to Mary the sister of Martha)		●	
●	Jesus			●
●	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples			▲
●	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room			▲

Scene 1

Martha , Mary

Martha Okay, the roast is in the oven. Now let's get these vegetables chopped.

Mary The dough looks ready. Should it go in, too?

Martha No, let's press it down again. Another short rise won't hurt. They should be here in half an hour, and then there'll be some talk and settling in. We'll put it in as soon as they arrive so we can serve it fresh out of the oven.

Mary What if it doesn't turn out? We won't have time to try another batch.

Martha It'll turn out, don't worry. This batch of flour is sound, or I'm a camel's hump. And think of the amazement! I love to watch them handle the steaming hot bread.

Mary You're as excited as I am.

Martha And honored. Just think! Out of all the homes in the village, he's coming to ours. We have to do right by so many: our fellow villagers, this teacher, ourselves.

Mary Rebecca heard him speak once. She told me one of his stories, about a boy who asks for his inheritance early but then goes and wastes it all and has to crawl back to his family begging, and I can't stop thinking about it! Every time I tell it to myself again, it changes, until I'm not sure what the real lesson is.

Martha *[skeptically]* That's a good story?

Mary It's the best kind! It's like hearing a new story every day.

Martha Well, I'll look forward to hearing one after dinner tonight. Oh, wait Mary, don't cut the carrots that way. Use this knife and give them a little curl, just like this, as thin as you can make them. We're going to sprinkle these over the roast right at end, and they'll curl even more as they bake.

Mary Oh, that'll be lovely! It'll be like the lamb has grown a new curly coat!

Martha A sweet one, too, crisping like that in the raw heat. This meal is going to be as delightful and as nourishing as any of the rabbi's stories!

Scene 2

Andrew , Eli , James , Joanna , Judas , Martha , Mary , Mary Magdalene , Phillip

{This scene switches back and forth between Martha and Mary's house and the home of one of their neighbors, Eli, just down the road.}

{ELI'S HOUSE}

- Eli** Greetings! You're quite a band of travelers. Where are you headed?
- James** Good evening. We're looking for the home of two sisters, Martha and Mary.
- Eli** Ah, my favorite neighbors. They live right over there. But are you planning to stay there tonight? If so, I don't see how they'll be able to accomodate you all.
- Judas** Their house does look pretty small, but they assured us they would have room for the whole group.
- James** *[finally confessing something]* Actually, that's not exactly true. I only told them there'd be thirteen of us.
- Phillip** Why would you tell them that?
- Andrew** There's like, more than twenty of us!
- James** *[lowering his voice and speaking more urgently]* All right, all right! I can count. I just didn't think *they'd* still be with us.
- Judas** Who?
- James** You know! The women, and all these newcomers.
- Judas** Where did you think they were going?
- James** *[angrily]* I don't know! I just didn't expect them to stick.
- Phillip** What are we going to do now?
- Eli** Excuse me, I couldn't help overhearing. I'd be pleased to put some of you up right here.
- Judas** We wouldn't be able to pay you much.
- Eli** Nonsense! Don't even think about paying me. I'm very well off, but the one thing I lack is company.
- Andrew** Great! So, who goes on to the sisters' house and who stays here?

James The rabbi should definitely go on. They're expecting him. As for who will stay behind...you four, and you and you, and you three. Phillip, Andrew: you, too.

Andrew Hey! I want to go with the rabbi. Why do we have to stay behind with the women and the newbies?

Phillip *[trying to gently lead him to the truth]* Andrew, think about it. It's the women, the newbies, and...

Andrew And you and me, that's what I just said. Why do we get stuck with -

Phillip *[patiently]* The women, the newbies, and...the "kids."

Andrew *[deflated]* Oh.

Judas *[teasingly]* Sorry, gentlemen. Rank has its privileges.

{MARTHA AND MARY'S HOUSE}

Mary They're here! They're here!

Martha Perfect timing! Go let them in while I put the bread in the oven.

Mary *[opening the door]* Welcome to our home!

James May I present...Joshua of Nazareth.

Mary We're honored to have you. Please come in and sit. I've heard one of your stories, and I think about it all the time. My cousin heard you tell it last month in the city, but I'd love to hear it again...

{ELI'S HOUSE}

Eli Now you all make yourselves at home, and I'll rustle us up some dinner.

Joanna Sir, if you'll show us your larder, Mary and I would be happy to do the cooking.

Eli The guests cook for the host? Not in my house!

**Mary
Magdalene** Can we give you a hand, then?

Eli Completely unnecessary. You just relax from your long journey and leave the food to me.

{Eli exits.}

Phillip That old man's going to try to cook for twelve people?

Andrew I've got a bad feeling about this.

{MARTHA AND MARY'S HOUSE}

Martha Mary? Mary, come give me a hand with this salad! Mary? *[goes to the living room and finds Mary sitting at Jesus's feet]* Mary, what are you doing out here?

Mary Oh, sorry! I was just listening to the rabbi tell a story.

Martha Well, I need you in the kitchen. *[to the others]* Pardon us.

Mary The story's almost done. Could I just hear the end? And then I'll be right in.

Martha All right. *[to Jesus]* But save some stories for me!

{ELI'S HOUSE}

{The group can hear him bustling about in the kitchen.}

Phillip What do you suppose he's up to?

Joanna Whatever it is, it'll probably be a while before we find out. You don't just whip out a meal in an hour. Not a real meal, anyway.

Andrew What do you suppose an old man who lives alone considers a real meal?

**Mary
Magdalene** Maybe we should take a peek and see what he's doing.

{But just then, Eli enters.}

Eli Here's some leftover bread and cheese. It's not enough for a meal, of course, or even to accompany a meal, but hopefully it will take the edge off your hunger until we eat in earnest. And *here [handing them a wineskin]* is some wine I think you'll enjoy. There's plenty of it, so just let me know when you empty this. Oh, and there's one thing you young men could do for me, after all: build up that fire a bit, and then spread it out so it

stretches across the entire hearth, will you?

{MARTHA AND MARY'S HOUSE}

{Martha comes out 15 minutes later to find Mary still listening to Jesus.}

Martha *[a little angrier in this scene than in the last]* Mary!

{The group goes silent.}

Martha You told me you'd come after the story ended, the story you said was almost done.

Mary Oh, I'm sorry! He started another one, and then another one, and I forgot.

Martha Well, come on now.

Mary But this story is almost - oh, I'm sorry!

{She gets up and returns to the kitchen with Martha.}

{ELI'S HOUSE}

Joanna This wine is excellent! He must be very well off, indeed. We didn't stock anything better in Herod's house.

Phillip The bread and cheese are gone, though, and I'm still hungry.

**Mary
Magdalene** I wonder what he's doing in there?

Andrew Maybe he's just hiding out until we get drunk enough to not care about dinner any more.

Joanna *[raising her glass]* If that's the plan and this is the wine, I'm all for it!

everybody Amen!

{MARTHA AND MARY'S HOUSE}

{Martha comes out to find that Mary has snuck out of the kitchen to hear more stories.}

Martha *[even angrier than before]* Mary! I can't believe this!

Mary I'm sorry, Martha! I couldn't resist.

Martha Well, I don't blame you any more.

Mary Really? Does that mean I can stay? Will you stay?

Martha I don't blame *you* any more. *[to the group]* I blame you!

{ELI'S HOUSE}

{The group is gathered at the hearth, where several dishes of food have been set, extending bits of meat into the fire on long sticks.}

Mary Sir, this is a wonderful dinner!

Phillip I can't remember ever having a better one. And we've been feasted by some pretty ritzy bigshots!

Eli Well, I'm just sorry it couldn't be a proper meal, but there wasn't time for bread or a real meat dish.

Joanna It was brilliant to think of cooking our meat bite-by-bite in the fire like this.

Andrew It's just like camping!

Mary These mealcakes are wonderful. Did you really just cook them?

Eli Oh, nothing's easier or quicker than to mix some oil and meal and pop it in the oven. The secret is good oil and a propitious choice of herbs.

Joanna These sauces are pretty "propitious" as well. Where did you learn to cook?

Eli My mother died when I was very young, and I had to learn pretty quickly to keep house for my father. I was all he had.

Phillip You should turn this place into an inn. Once we start telling people about your cooking, they'll come from far and wide.

Eli Could you keep this a secret? The women of the neighborhood come and cook for me because they think I'm helpless, and I let them think it because...well, because I like their company. My own wife died at an even younger age than my mother...

Mary Of course we'll keep your secret.

Andrew What will we say when the others ask us what we ate here?

Joanna We'll tell them that Mary and I cooked, like we offered.

Andrew But won't that be a lie?

Eli I don't want to get you into any trouble with your leader.

Phillip *[with mock seriousness]* It's important for a disciple to always tell the truth. However, we're just "the women, the newbies, and the kids." So I don't think that rule applies totally to us.

everybody Amen!

Scene 3

James , Jesus , John , Martha , Mary , Peter

James *[responding angrily to Martha's accusation from the last scene]* You blame us? That's absurd! We didn't tell her to glome onto us. Maybe you just can't --

Jesus *[interrupting him]* Martha, Martha. You're anxious over so much, but there really aren't many things that are absolutely essential in this life. In fact, there's only one, and Mary has chosen it. The cares of the day will be gone tomorrow, but what she has chosen will remain forever!

{a brief silence as everyone contemplates the big lesson}

Martha *[drawing herself up]* Begging your pardon, but that's just so much B.S.!

{there are shocked gasps from everyone in the room}

James Look, lady, you can't talk to the rabbi like that!

John *[trying to keep the peace]* James, I'm sure all she meant was... *[to Martha]* Uh, what exactly did you mean?

Martha *[firmly]* Just this. "The cares of the day" as you call them: they don't just disappear the next day, unless they're taken care of today! If I don't get any help with dinner, it's going to be late. And if dinner begins late, it will end late. And so the cleaning up will begin late. And if I don't get any help with that, either, it really will last until tomorrow, and I'll be the one up late doing it! Is that right? Is that fair?

{uncomfortable silence}

John *[meekly]* What if we helped out?

James With the housework? Are you crazy?

John Why not? If it would help.

James I am *not* going to do woman's work!

Martha [*indignantly*] Don't you worry, good sir. I don't want your help! What do you men know about cleaning a house, anyway?

Peter [*boldly*] I once brought in an entire haul of fish when my brother took sick in the boat. If I could do that, I can clean up your little house.

Martha [*warming to him*] I like your attitude. I might just put you to the test!

James We should have brought the women. Let's send for them right now!

Mary You have women in your group?

John Yeah, they're staying, along with a few more of us, with your neighbor down the road by the well.

Martha [*scoffing*] Eli's? How's he going to host them? He's a bachelor without a clue. Well, you needn't call your women over. I guarantee you that they're already plenty busy over there.

Peter [*gallantly*] Then it's us or nobody. Come on. Give us a try. You're not going to be able to get the rabbi to stop telling stories, anyway, now that he's gotten started. *We* can't even do that.

Martha [*giving in to the comic hopelessness of the situation*] You know you won't really be helping me at all, don't you? That I'm going to spend more time directing you and correcting you and cleaning up after you than we spend cleaning up the house? And that we're all going to be up even later because of that?

John It might be fun.

Peter Like a party!

Martha [*calming down and taking charge again*] Okay, how about this? One more story. (Maybe two.) Then we eat. Then we clean up. Then, if everyone can still keep their eyes open, we can have more stories.

Mary That's perfect! Thank you!

James [*still holding onto his outrage*] Wait just a second! It's not up to her! I don't care if this *is* her house.

John *[to Jesus]* What about it? Can we do as she suggests?

{Everyone goes silent, waiting to see what he'll decide.}

Jesus *[to Martha]* You're the boss.

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
www.WineskinProject.net/blog/martha*

Copyright © 2014 by Freeman Ng and the Wineskin Project

Freeman Ng is a writer, poet, and Google software engineer living in Oakland, California. He's also the author of:

- *Joan* - a novelization of the life of Joan of Arc
- *Who Am I?* - a personalizable picture book
- **Haiku Diem** - a daily haiku feed that's been going since July, 2010

www.AuthorFreeman.com