“Slow Down You Are Moving Too Fast”

Simon and Garfunkel back in the 1966 sang a song called, “Feelin’ Groovy.” The story behind this song goes like this: Paul Simon had just returned from England and was in a writer’s funk. He was writing very somber and depressing songs. Then one day he was walking home at 6 am on the 59th St. Bridge in New York City, and he couldn’t help but notice the groovy type of day it was starting out to be. He then started to see everything else around him. Cars zipping by, men at work on the bridge, the loud noises of the city, even the sound of his feet on the metal grates as he walks. So Paul Simon begins his new song “Feelin’ groovy” with

“Slow down, you’re moving too fast,
You’ve got to make the morning last.
Just kicking down the cobbled stones,
Looking for fun and feeling groovy.”

The second stanza begins,

“Hello lamp post what cha knowing,
I came to watch your flowers growing,
Ain’t you got no rhymes for me?
Dootin’ doo-doo, feeling groovy.”

The main point Paul Simon was getting across in this song was simple. Appreciate the things of life. Don’t get caught up in the craziness. Notice the things that are truly beautiful and notice the things that truly matter.

As I read our lesson for today, I couldn’t help but think of Paul Simon. This song that he sang is one that really describes Mary and Martha in our lesson. Martha is going all out to prepare the house and a meal, yet her sister Mary sat down at the feet of Jesus to listen to what the Lord had to say. Jesus’ response to Martha is quite telling. “You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” Slow down Martha you’re movin’ too fast, listen to the words of Jesus.

The background of our lesson for today is quite simple. Jesus and his disciples are moving from one town to the next, preaching and teaching and healing people. Just as Jesus told the 72 men he had sent out that food and drink would be found in homes of nice people along the way, so too our Lord Jesus as he was doing ministry relied also on strangers opening their homes to him and his disciples. So here Jesus is in a new town and night time is coming and Mary and Martha, two sisters, open their home to Jesus and his fellow disciples.

Put yourselves in Mary and Martha’s shoes. You are out listening to the message of forgiveness of sins that Jesus and his disciples are preaching, and after talking it over with each other, you decide that you would open your home to Jesus and his disciples. Now I have had guests over before. My wife and I divvy up the chores and the things to do. My guess is that Mary and Martha did the same. Mary and Martha probably both agreed that once Jesus
comes into their home they will make accommodations for him so that he would have something to eat and a nice place to sleep etc. This however didn’t go as planned. Mary, as soon as Jesus came in, sat at his feet and listened to him. Most likely, she had already heard Jesus speak the Word of Everlasting Life in town, but she wanted to know more. She wanted to hear Jesus even more. And so there she was as she sat, consuming every word as if it were drops of water in the desert air.

This “stunt” that Mary pulled didn’t go over well with Martha. Martha was left to do all of the preparations herself. She was so busy. She had to do this, and then that, and don’t forget about this, oh, and that. It seemed like a never ending list of things to do and things to make and things to clean, “Mary!” Martha is screaming in her head, “Why aren’t you helping me!” Martha couldn’t take it anymore. This life of riley that Mary chose can’t be something that Jesus would agree with, Mary, according to Martha was being a bit lazy and inconsiderate. So Martha chimed in on Mary and Jesus’ one on one conversation. “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” Finally she got it off her chest and Jesus turned around and didn’t agree with Martha one bit. “Slow down Martha you’re moving too fast. Mary has chosen the one thing needful.”

We see ourselves in this example from God’s Word today. Life itself is something we get so wrapped up in that we fail to hear the one thing that is needful. When you look at the amount of time we spend on ourselves versus the amount of time that Bible Study, church, prayer and devotions would take up. The amount of time we spend on ourselves far outweighs the time we spend on the one thing needful. That out of whack balance though is not in and of itself wrong. God has given you everything from your talents to your home to your job to your money. He never demands everything from us. God however does tell us in his Word that we should place him first. Our first priority every day should be to feed our faith with the word. Our first priority of the week should be to worship the one true God in church. Our first priority in each of our lives is to put God number one. Everything else, all of the clutter of life that seemingly chokes away our time, doesn’t matter. Only God matters.

Take this example albeit may be a little over the top. Your job demands almost everything from you. Your work day doesn’t have defined beginnings or ends. Work dictates when you sleep, eat, and have fun. You are very well paid for this position, yet you don’t get to church, you don’t read devotions, you don’t read the Word. All you do is work, sleep and eat. Not always in that order. When God comes back to judge the living and the dead you will have been absolutely faithful to your employer. You will have had many successes in life. Yet you allowed everything in your life choke out the one thing that mattered, Jesus. And so on judgment day you are not found to be a sheep of Jesus but a goat. A very successful, well liked, hardworking goat with a beautiful house, car, vacation property, etc. The one thing that is needed is missing, and you are then sentenced to eternal suffering in the fires of hell.
Now you may be thinking, pastor, that’s a bit extreme isn’t it? I don’t know, you tell me, look around here at church. Some are I’m sure at church elsewhere. But where are the other 250 souls that are members of this church? Our sinful nature, whether we think so or not, has already laid the groundwork for apathy in our own worship life. When you miss church, is there disappointment? Or is there simply, “oh well, it’s not like I can’t go next week.” You see we simply assume that God is never going to return and God will never come back and we will always have an opportunity to hear God’s word later on. Isn’t that exactly what Martha’s stance was? So much needed to be done right then and we shall listen to Jesus at a different time Mary, as of right now there is work to be done!

When we are tempted to think that Jesus doesn’t mind when we blow off church for other pressing issues in our life, such as sleep, brunch, family get togethers, vacations, work or any other thing that may take God’s place, we need to remember what Jesus said to Martha. “Martha, Martha”, Jesus said, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed.” Only one thing is needed. Notice the one thing needed is sitting and listening to Jesus. It’s not sleeping in, going out for brunch, getting together with family, going on vacation, or work. These things are not even close to being needed in comparison to God’s saving word. Only one thing is needed.

So what is God’s advice to Martha and to all of us busy Americans? Slow down, you’re moving too fast. Sit down and listen. You need a break? Come receive the true rest that only the gospel message can give to the heart and soul. It is in the Word of God that our hearts are put to rest, knowing Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Jesus went to the cross on Calvary’s mountain to once and for all settle the score between sin death and devil and mankind. Jesus’ sacrifice of innocence on the cross wiped away the punishment of sin from the hearts of believers. All who believe in Jesus are saved through the work of Jesus. God’s grace is sufficient for us. He has done everything for us. He even proved his victory over sin death and the devil, by rising again from the grave. Appearing and preaching and doing miracles in front of countless people. The one thing that is needed in our life is Christ Jesus our Lord. His death and resurrection and hearing it as often as possible is what we need.

Now I realize life isn’t very accommodating to God’s Word and a worship life. You my dear friends have to make that choice clear. When something comes up that could rival the one thing that is actually needed, say no.

A friend of mine really wanted to go out east and do some hiking and sightseeing. When he was up in the Maine area, he had to make a choice, do I head further north, isolating myself from the one WELS church in Maine, or do I wait until after Worship on Sunday and then go up north for the final part of my vacation. Let’s be honest. Does this thought even cross our minds on vacation? It should. God wants you to form your life around him, not the other way around. He is first in our life. Therefore everything else conforms to him.
I am pretty sure when Paul Simon wrote “felling groovy” he never thought a WELS pastor in Wrightstown would use it to make a point. But I think the point is well taken. This world moves at a breakneck pace. The world will tempt us to forget about God’s Word. Paul Simon will tell you, “Slow down you’re moving too fast” don’t avoid, forget, or lose track of the one thing that is needful in this lifetime. Slow down and sit at the feet of Jesus. Listen to his wondrous words of Salvation. Slow down and hear the message of forgiveness. That’s what matters and nothing else. AMEN