Martha and Mary in the Context of Luke's Unfolding Travel Narrative.

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A. Introduction.

The story of Martha and Mary in Luke's gospel attracts attention by casual readers and scholars alike. There is something in this very short account of Jesus' interaction with these two women that draws us in – and yet at the same time raises a host of questions. Is this a story about hospitality, or ministry? Is there a competition between Martha and Mary? If so, who is validated? And why does Luke place this story here?

Part of the fascination of this story is the curious fact that Martha and Mary are also characters in John's gospel. But in the Fourth Gospel, Martha and Mary take on a much larger role – first as sisters of Lazarus who has died. In the course of their dialogue with Jesus about the death of Lazarus, topics of faith and resurrection swirl about them, making this truly a crucial event in John's gospel. And then, as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem for that final fateful trip, Martha and Mary appear again, and this time it is Mary who is the center of attention as she anoints Jesus' feet and wipes them with her hair – an act of devotion that is to be remembered forever.

And as much as this notable concurrence of the two sisters occurs in both gospels – undoubtedly speaking to some kind of tradition connection between John and Luke – this is not my focus here (though you might have expected me to pursue it).[1] It is hard for me to see any evidence of a literary relationship between Luke's Martha and Mary, and John's Martha and Mary. John's story I can fit into his account of Jesus rather neatly – the Lazarus raising brings to a culmination the negative reaction of the "Jews". This is the impetus to "indict" Jesus in a secret Sanhedrin meeting. And Mary's subsequent foot anointing so nicely anticipates Jesus'

own Footwashing of the disciples. But what does Luke see Martha and Mary doing in his story of Jesus, who is just beginning his long journey to Jerusalem?

I hope in this paper to offer at least a tentative answer to the question of why this story occurs here, and what the rhetorical thrust of its placement there might mean for our understanding of the story itself. But by way of getting to that answer, some preliminary steps must be taken first. (a) first, I want to place this story in its context in Luke's gospel. (b) Then I would like to more closely examine the language of our pericope. Then (c) I want to return to the issue of its place in Luke's narrative with some suggestions about Luke's compositional strategy.

B. The Travel Narrative.

As is well known, Luke carves out a distinctive feature in the form of his central section, the "travel narrative (TN)." Almost a third of Luke's gospel is contained in this central section, from 9:51 to approximately 18:31. In this TN section, Luke leaves the Markan narrative sequence and inserts material drawn from Q or Matthew (depending on your view of the two-source or Farrer hypothesis), as well some of the more significant "uniquely Lukan," or "L" material – such as the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and the Lazarus and rich man parable. And, of course, the Martha and Mary story is part of that uniquely Lukan material.

While the TN begins with a notable geographical orientation – in 9:51 Luke says " When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem," – the rest of the TN is notable for its lack of geographical locations or references to particular time. That is, while Jesus is frequently depicted as "on the way" or "on the way to Jerusalem," one never knows precisely where he is or how long he stays, or even how long the entire duration of this TN is. Only when Luke has rejoined the Markan narrative sequence, more or less where he left it at chapter 9, do we find Jesus entering into Jericho at Luke 18:35, and shortly thereafter

chronological time is mentioned as the Passover draws near. But the long section of the TN makes no mention of time or place. Instead we find generalizing comments like: "…he entered a certain village (κώμην τινά)" (Lk 10:38); or "he was praying in a certain place (τόπῳ τινὶ)…" (Lk 11:1); or "on one occasion when Jesus entered (ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ἐλθεῖν) into a house of certain ruler of the Pharisees…" (Lk 14:1). The closest one ever gets to a geographical location is in 9:52, where Jesus approaches a village of Samaritans (note, not necessarily a village in Samaria), and in 17:11 when Jesus is depicted "on the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee," which is still quite vague.

In a couple of papers I previously wrote I understood this section as a deliberate hiatus from Luke's generally careful chronological/historical attention both before and after the TN, a hiatus in which he signals to his audience by means of the "travel notice" that the material gathered together here is arranged in a way that is not chronological.[2] More importantly, I noted in another paper a pattern in Luke's arrangement of material in the TN.[3] Luke groups material into thematic clusters. To demonstrate a couple of examples, I take note here of some key clusters: (a) prayer, (b) greed and possessions, (c) Lost parables (d) Meal setting. (see handout).

[Prayer] In chapter 11 of Luke, the evangelist has made a distinct shift from the Martha Mary story that concludes chapter 10. There is a scene shift and the key teaching is said to follow Jesus having retreated to pray: Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐν τόπῳ τινὶ προσευχόμενον, ὡς ἐπαύσατο, εἶπέν τις τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν "He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him:" What follows is a request by the disciples to be taught how to pray, and Jesus follows this with the Lord's Prayer (from Matthew or Q). But unlike Matthew, Luke goes on to expand the teaching on the role of prayer with two more pericope. First, he introduces a uniquely Luke account of the persistent

friend who finally gets his request from repeated requests. Then he adds another Matthew/Q (Matt. 7: 7-11) pericope about asking and receiving good things (modified by Luke to be receiving the Holy Spirit). The net effect is to expand and amplify the teaching on prayer to a more central role in the teaching.

[greed and possessions] In chapter 12, after a pair of teachings drawn from Matthew/Q on the need for consistency in one's life and language, and the need for fearless confession of faith, both of which speak to a "simplicity and singleness of purpose," Luke focuses explicitly on that simplicity involving possessions. He begins with a teaching that is an "L" passage – a warning against avarice/greed in Luke 12: 13-15. Luke then follows this with a uniquely Lukan parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21). In this parable, a rich man has a bumper crop and so decides to tear down his old barns and build new ones to hold the crops, and then he can relax in his wealth. But the parable concludes with the fact that his death is to come first, which renders the pursuit of wealth pointless (cf. Ecclesiastes). Jesus concludes this parable with the conclusion: "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God." But Luke is not done with this theme yet. He now adds two additional pericope from Matthew/Q in reverse order: first, a warning about anxiety about "things" from Mathew 6:25-34, then followed up with Matthews teaching about storing up treasures in heaven instead of treasures on earth (Matt. 6:19-21). The resulting sequence makes a much stronger emphasis about the teaching against greed and concern about "things" than what is found in other gospels.

For the sake of time, I won't discuss at length other examples of this compositional strategy of Luke, but in the handout I noted two other thematic sequences: that of the "lost" sequence in Luke chapter 15, and the meal teaching sequence in Luke chapter 14. And in my "Rewriting the Sermon on the Mount" article I discuss this pattern more. But I hope the pattern is clear – Luke

often in the TN combines material from Matthew/Q and then either adds other teaching/parables from his own unique "L" source, or perhaps composes new material, to create a thematic focus.

C. The Martha/Mary Story.

Before returning to the larger question of why the Martha/Mary story is placed here in Luke's TN, I would like to examine more closes Luke's story itself for clues about what its central focus is.

As Barbara Reid notes, this story has usually been taken to be a story in which Martha and Mary are cast into conflict, with Martha's role as "server" diminished, and Mary's role as "listener" valorized.[4] There are a number of reasons that a binary opposition between Martha and Mary, many of which arise from our translations and textual choices. So I want to consider here a number of those issues in a reading of the Lukan story.

The scene opens with Jesus and companions (the disciples of v. 23, or even the 70 of v. 17?) coming to a "certain" village in which resides Martha. She assumes the role of head of household and welcomes (ὑποδέξατο) him into her house. The focus on the fact that this is her house underscores her central role. Given the importance of hospitality already established in Luke's gospel, and especially in the opening of the TN, this welcome places Martha in a significant positive light.[5]

Martha's role at the beginning is described as performing διακονία. Both this noun and the cognate verb διακονέω are used to describe her activity and function. Traditionally this has been taken to mean that such "service" she provides of preparation and serving of food. And while that is certainly a possibility in this context, and can be one form of διακονία, it by no means is the central thrust of the word group. Although the TDNT article by Beyer makes the claim that the central focus is that of "waiting on table" or "provision of bodily sustenance,"[6] more recent

research instead suggests that the main function of διακονία is to function as a "go between," often in a communicative role.[7] In a major monograph devoted to διακονία published in 1990, John N. Collins argues persuasively that being a "go between" explains many more of the varied uses.[8] For instance, the term is used for Hermes' role as a "go-between" sent by Zeus to humans and other gods. And so also in the New Testament the sense of διακονία is much broader. Consider the use in Luke/Acts aside from Martha: In a number of instances the verb διακονέω is used specifically an "table-waiting" contexts: Luke 4:39, 17:8, 22:26, 27, and possibly Acts 6. But in other situations the verb διακονέω, and certainly the noun διακονία seem instead to refer to service or ministry generally, and sometimes explicitly service of the "word": In Luke 8:3, the women who support Jesus' ministry out of their means do not seem to be waiting table, but supporting the ministry financially. In particular, though, the term διακονία in Acts is applied to both the apostles (and essentially equated with apostleship in 1:25) and with mission work generally, as Paul refers to his "ministry" in 12:25, 20:24, and 21:19. Even the role of "deacons" in Acts distinguishes between the "daily ministry" (of deeds?) and the "ministry of word" of the apostles (Acts 6:1-2). And Paul's use in his letters seems to use both διακονέω and διακονία in various functions of going, sending, and delivering financial support. But not necessarily waiting table.[9]

If we return to Luke's Martha, then, it is not clear that Martha's primarily role as providing διακονία is serving a meal. She is a "doer" in ways that seem to be providing service; but the nature of the service is deliberately ambiguous. And this service, I think, is depicted as a positive quality. The critique accrues to her "worry" and "distraction," not that her service is not worthy.

Moreover, it is not clear that only Mary is the one that attends to Jesus as a "disciple." In a major textual variant in Luke 10:39b which was included in NA 26 -28, but in square brackets, and included in Michael Holmes' SBLGNT with no hesitancy, we find the relative pronoun, ἥ just before Mary is introduced: ἡ καὶ παρακαθεσθεῖσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἤκουεν τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ,[10] "...who *also*, while sitting at the feet of Jesus, was listening to his word." The addition of ἥ here implies that Martha also was in the habit of "sitting at Jesus feet" (i.e., following Jesus), though in this instance it was Mary who was listening to his word.

One final textual note also must be made: there is a major textual divide in Lk 10:41-42. While NA and UBSGNT end the sentence with a short ἑνὸς δέ ἐστιν χρεία, Gordon Fee and others have argued for a well-attested longer reading as found in Michael Holmes' SBLGNT: ὀλίγων δέ ἐστιν χρεία ἢ ἑνός.[11] In addition to Fee's argument,[12] Tommy Wasserman also now supports this longer reading with substantial corrections to the patristic citations.[13] While the UBS textual committee argued that the longer reading was a conflation of two readings, producing "little sense." Wasserman I think successfully argues against this reasoning in light of patristic citations which often understood the ὀλίγων in terms of ministry of πρᾶξις while the one thing (ἑνος) was understood to refer to contemplation (θεωρια) – and thus it made perfect sense to Origen and other Fathers.

The well-attested longer reading at 10:42, together with the relative pronoun ἡ in 10:39 offer a picture of Martha and Mary's relative roles quite differently.[14] Martha is also a "follower of Jesus" who could be understood as one who sat at Jesus' feet, and the issue here is one of a distinction between a ministry of action and a ministry of listening/contemplation. Martha's concern is with getting things done, and so her complaint suggests that Mary, by listening, is not serving. Jesus then responds that Martha's concern has caused her to be troubled. While she is concerned with

many things (πολλά), Jesus suggests only a few things are really needed, perhaps indeed only one. While this is a clear affirmation of Mary's role of "listening to Jesus," the response is but a mild rebuke of Martha's worrying over getting this done; it is not a rejection of her ministry of action. In fact, the final sentence also suggests this softer division between the roles of the two: "Mary has chosen a good (ἀγαθήν) portion" – it does not say "better" portion.

D. Martha and Mary in Luke's Travel Narrative

How, then, do we make sense of this story of Martha and Mary within the context of Luke's Travel Narrative? John Kilgallen posed the same question, working with the correct view that Luke as a composer arranges material in his gospel for rhetorical purpose.[15] Luke is not an inartful editor, but a thoughtful author with an eye to emphasizing major themes, often by his own sense of order (καθεξῆς).

Kilgallen notes that a central focus in the Martha & Mary story is the valorization of Mary's hearing. He then notes that in a preceding passage, the discourse to the disciples at 10:24, the emphasis is on the value of their hearing things that even prophets and kings had desired to hear. The close proximity of these two passages that place importance on ἀκούειν points to Luke's purpose in placing the Mary and Martha story here. But separating these two passages is the pericope of 10:25-37, which notably includes the Good Samaritan passage. Kilgallen argues that this parable, with its teaching on the nature of love, is "unique" and "startling." The two pericope that frame it, that is 10:24 teaching that the disciples are hearing things that prophets wished to hear, and 10:38-41 with its emphasis on Mary's hearing, forming an *inclusio* that points to the importance of the Good Samaritan's love (which for him is the central emphasis in this cluster).

This is a helpful starting point, but I would suggest that Kilgallen might have cast his net a bit more broadly, i.e., to consider the larger scheme of Luke's theme in the opening section of the TN. It seems that three elements seem to continually reappear in this opening sequence: (1) acceptance/rejection of Jesus (and his emissaries) (2) discipleship as "doing," and (3) the importance of hearing Jesus. And we might then gather all three of these together under a loose category of "attributes of discipleship."

First, we will consider the role that acceptance or rejection play in this unit of text that runs from 9:51 to 10:42. Jesus, after setting his sights toward Jerusalem, immediately attempts to enter a Samaritan village; but he is rejected (οὐκ ἐδέξαντο αὐτον) by them. This is followed by the sending of the 70 to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom; a charge that focuses almost entirely on their reception. If they are received/welcomed (δέχωνται), then peace will settle on that household; if the are rejected (μὴ δέχωνται), they are kick the dust off them as they depart. This emphasis on the necessity of acceptance is made even more emphatic by the woes pronounced on Bethsaida and Chorazin as examples of such a lack of hospitality. This focus on the necessity of being welcomed (δεχομαι) finds a final positive conclusion with Mary's welcome of Jesus into her house (ὑποδέξατο). This focus has often been termed "hospitality," but hospitality seems to be too domestic, and so the broader issue of acceptance and welcome seem more apt and captures all these uses.

Secondly, there is an emphasis on the need to <u>do things</u> to follow Jesus. The would be followers of Jesus in 9:57-60 are told that following Jesus requires action: "follow me" (9:59), "go proclaim the Kingdom of God" (9:60), and finally "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God" (9:62). This message carries over into the sending of the seventy – they are sent as "workers" (ἐργάται) to reap a harvest by going and proclaiming.

And in response to the lawyer's questioning about the what is needed in the law, he responds "do this and live" (10:28), followed by an example of what "doing this" (i.e. showing love to neighbor) would look like – it is the task of serving one in need with action as exemplified by the Good Samaritan. Indeed, the final response of the lawyer is that the one who loves is the one "doing mercy" (ποιήσας τὸ ἔλεος). And, again, the conclusion of this emphasis is found in Martha's "doing" – she serves, she ministers (perhaps to a fault).

Finally, as Kilgallen notes, there is an emphasis on "hearing" – but it is broader in scope in these opening pericopes than he finds. We find the emphasis first raised when Jesus sends out the 70: he concludes the "woes on rejection" by linking acceptance or rejection with "hearing": "Whoever listens (ἀκούων) to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me." (Luke 10:16) Thus, hearing (or not hearing) is a form of acceptance/rejection. Then, on the successful return of the 70, hearing is made more specific as the essence of what the followers of Jesus participate in with him: "Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! [24] For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it." (Luke 10:23-24). And finally, hearing is the focus of Mary's activity in Luke 10:38-42: Mary listens to "his word," and this particular activity is judged to be the good part.

Welcoming Jesus, doing ministry on behalf of Jesus, and listening to him are all constituent parts of discipleship, and these three attributes of discipleship are interwoven as the initial theme of Luke's TN. Moreover, all three of these attributes are engaged in the Martha and Mary story. It serves, then, as a concluding anchor to this section of the TN.

[1] Much of my work has been in the relationship of Luke and John. See especially Mark A. Matson, *In Dialogue with Another Gospel? The Influence of the Fourth Gospel on the Passion Narrative of the Gospel of Luke*. SBLDS 178. Atlanta: SBL, 1998.

[2] Mark A. Matson, "The Rhetoric of Time and Place in Luke's Travel Narrative https://www.academia.edu/33148307/The_Rhetoric_of_Time_and_Place_in_Lukes_Travel_Narrative and "Historical and Adventure Time in Luke's Gospel" https://www.academia.edu/29985853/Historical_and_Adventure_Time_in_Lukes_Gospel

[3] Mark A. Matson, "Luke's Rewriting of the Sermon on the Mount," in *Questioning Q*, p. 43-70, ed. Mark Goodacre and Nicholas Perrin, SPCK 2004.

[4] Barbara Reid, *Women in the Gospel of* Luke (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996).

[5] Note, for instance, the importance of hospitality (or lack of by Simon the Pharisee) in the story of the sinner woman who anointed Jesus' feet in Luke 7:36-50. Closer to our passage, the opening verses of Jesus' rejection at the Samaritan village (οὐκ ἐδέξαντο in Lk 9:53, and the necessity of being "welcomed" (δέχωνται in Lk 10:8). Thus in short compass, various forms of δέχομαι are shown to be crucial to this open section of Luke's TN.

[6] See Hermann Beyer, "διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος," *TDNT* II: 81-93. He finds the core meaning to be "to wait at table," (p. 82) which influences all his subsequent discussion.

[7] See also Warren Carter on this issue, "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen: Luke 10:38-42 Again" *CBQ* 58 (1996):264-280.

[8] John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-intepreting the Ancient Sources*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[9] Note also that in Paul's letters, the use if διακονία is often used in the sense of a ministry (go between) between groups. See for instance 2 Cor. 3:3 and 3:19 in very different contexts, but both suggesting some "go between" function.

[10] The ἡ is absent in $\mathfrak{P}^{45.75}$, *א, B^{2}, L, Ξ, 579, pc.

[11] Short reading (per NA): $\mathfrak{P}^{45.75}$, C^{*}, W, Θ, A, Ψ, f^{13}, $\mathfrak{M}$, lat, $sy^{(c),\,p,h}$, sa, bo^{ms}, Chr, Nil, Aug. The longer reading (accepted also by W-H, Goulder, Weiss, Lagrange): $\mathfrak{P}^{3}$, א, B, C^{2}, L, 070^{vid}, f^{1}, 33, pc, sy^{hmg}, bo, Bas, Or, Cyr, Hier, Cn

[12] Gordon Fee, "One Thing is Needful? Luke 10:42" in *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis; Essays in Honour of Bruce M. Metzger*, ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981): 61-75.

[13] Tommy Wasserman, "Bringing Sisters Back Together: Another Look at Luke 10:41-42", *JBL* (2018): 439-61.

[14] I should note here a very fine article by Christopher Hutson which also, along with Warren Carter, raises real questions about the tension between Martha and Mary. See "Martha's Choice: A Pastorally Sensitive Reading of Luke 10:38-42," *RQ* 45 (2003): 139-150.

[15] John J. Kilgallen, "Martha and Mary: Why at Luke 10, 38-42?" *Biblica*, 84 (2003): 554-561.