

Martha of Bethany

I am Martha of Bethany. I have a sister, Mary and a brother, Lazarus. Lazarus is the thoughtful one, Mary the pretty one and I, the practical one. Lazarus had never been strong and when our parents died, Mary and I stayed with him to take care of him. He was very interested in the Teacher, Jesus of Nazareth, but not able to travel to hear him, so we opened our home to Jesus and his followers. There was quite a group of them. Lazarus and Mary joined the group that listened to the teaching but I had to take care of preparing food and arranging sleeping quarters.

I got annoyed at Mary because it is woman's work and she was not doing her share. Jesus rebuked me and I saw that although I portrayed myself as a servant, I was not doing it willingly. There was even a remnant of the competition for the attention of our parents that went back as far as I could remember. My attitude did change. I realized that I had a responsibility to use my gift and rejoiced at the opportunity.

Lazarus was not an old man but he acted like one and when it became apparent that he was dying, we called for Jesus. The long delay was very difficult. We knew that Jesus traveled across the land and might not be near, but when the messengers came back and we still did not see Jesus, we were puzzled. Lazarus just slowly faded away. I tried to encourage him to hold on for the Teacher but he assured me that it was all for the best. I cried out to God, "How can it be best for this devout man to die?"

From the moment he died, Mary and I and all the mourners who came discussed how Jesus could have cured him. Those were my first words when I greeted Jesus. He spoke of the resurrection and I believed in the resurrection of the last days. He told me that He was the resurrection and the life. It all sort of slipped through my troubled mind without my really understanding what He was driving at. When Mary arrived and then the mourners, they each echoed our "If you had been here..." speech. But Jesus asked to go to the tomb.

He asked for the stone to be rolled back. My practical side reminded him of the stench of death. He reminded me that if we believed, we would see the glory of God! Then He looked up and loudly prayed. I felt a trembling power filling the whole area and just knew that something amazing was going to happen.

Jesus called to Lazarus. There was silence, then a faint rustling noise from the tomb, then out of the darkness appeared a vague whiteness that became a visible figure when nearing the opening. Lazarus was edging slowly as well as his tightly wrapped legs could carry him. Jesus said, "Take off his grave clothes and let him go." We were so shocked that it took a while before anyone did so. Mary and I ran up to embrace him. There was no stench of death even on the strips that bound him.

Lazarus looked healthier and younger than we had ever seen him. He knelt before Jesus and received some instruction that I could not hear, then he went through the crowd thanking them for coming and inviting them to stay for dinner – just like a man. I

hurried back to the house to check our supplies and send servants for more. But when I came back out, I noticed that not everyone was happy. Some of the Pharisees were talking about informing the chief priests and the Sanhedrin. They talked about more people believing in Jesus as if that were a bad thing. We even later heard rumors that they might kill Lazarus. So Mary and I were not done taking care of our brother.

We arranged a celebration in honor of Jesus and invited all His real friends. Lazarus was reclining next to Jesus, I was serving – gladly this time – and Mary disappeared for a little while. When she came back, it was with a bottle of very expensive perfume, usually used to anoint bodies for burial. I don't know why we didn't use it for Lazarus, but Mary used it to anoint Jesus feet and wiped them with her hair. This had happened to Jesus in a town called Nain and we had heard of it. Mary decided to repeat it. She was the dramatic one.

The result was very interesting. Firstly Judas, one of the twelve, complained that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. That resonated with my practical side. It was only later that we learned that Judas was a traitor and a thief. But Jesus said something remarkable. "Leave her alone, it was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

He was again reminding us that He was leaving but also that there would always be the poor. We were charitable and always tried to help the down-trodden as the law and Jesus' teaching commands, but that there would be a permanent solution for poverty, the Master told us was not going to happen.

Anyway, we had become celebrities, with both the positive and negative aspects of that. Some people just came out of morbid curiosity to see Lazarus because he was a sensation. But some came and listened to his story and became followers of Jesus. More ominous were those who came hoping to either discredit the story or even worse, dispose of the evidence. The whole family had been given a responsibility: Me to handle the practical details of running a home open to people of all kinds; Mary to entertain the guests; Lazarus to tell his story to those who really wanted to know, with an open heart and a hungry soul. We were **all** raised to new life!

Luke 10:38-42 John 11:1-53 John 12:1-11