

20.3.22.

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### Mary and Martha

Last Sunday Carol helped us see how 2 women's encounter with Jesus changed them, leading them into more life and greater freedom. Today we think about 2 more women, also not mentioned in Paula Gooders book!

I've always been very fond of Mary and Martha. Perhaps because I come from a family of two sisters. I'm the older sensible, serious one and my sister always seemed to be having all the fun, at least when we were teenagers!

From all I could speak about this morning I'd like us to focus on a conversation. In my opinion one of the most important conversations in the gospels. It takes place between Jesus and Martha, in reality a few others were probably listening in too!

How often do we allow ourselves to see just how radical the gospel is? Written at a time when women and children were commodities yet on its pages we see them valued and honoured by Jesus in a way that even the disciples found shocking.

The gospel primarily tells of 3 years of life but they are packed into 4 very short books! Is it deliberate that gospel stories are so brief? Allowing space for us to weave our own life stories alongside.

In our 2 readings today some details are included but many are not. I'm left itching to ask where was Lazarus in our first story? Were the sisters married? What about their parents? They were friends of Jesus, but were they part of the wealthy group of women who financed Jesus' ministry?

We know Mary and Martha lived in Bethany only 2 miles from Jerusalem. It's possible they regularly offered Jesus and his disciples hospitality, their home being such an easy walk into the city.

In our 1st reading we find Mary, sitting at Jesus' feet, with the men, listening to the conversation whilst Martha is busy in the kitchen, trying to ensure that her guests have a special meal. She wants to show Jesus how much she cares. I wonder what Martha felt when Jesus tells her that Mary has made the better choice? Did Martha feel told off? I hope not. One thing about these brief stories is, they rarely give us an indication of Jesus' tone of voice. I imagine him teasing Martha reassuring her that bread, cheese and fruit is all they need. Nothing fancy is required. Inviting her to come and join them. Jesus' priority is always relationship. Despite this we still can be left with the impression that Mary is the holy sister and Martha the busy, practical one who serves. Nevertheless Jesus loves them both equally.

The raising of Lazarus is such a pivotal story, it shows that Jesus has power over death. Yet at the same time confirming the Pharisees powerlessness and their decision that Jesus must die. This story reveals Jesus and God are one. It's full of emotion. Jesus weeps with his friends and we see Jesus giving new life and freedom. It includes one of the most hope filled verses in the Bible. This verse is part of the conversation Jesus has with Martha.

Hearing Jesus is about to arrive Martha goes to meet Him, leaving Mary at the house. I imagine Martha is disappointed Jesus didn't arrive before Lazarus died.

Martha says “Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Jesus replies “Your brother will rise again”. ( Jesus is telling her what is going to happen)

But Martha, unable to grasp what Jesus is saying, gives the only answer she can. “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day”. (Meaning she has been taught that resurrection will be a once for all event at the end of time.)

Jesus says “ I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” John 11:25

Martha, even in her grief, answers saying she believes in who Jesus is. “You are the Messiah, the Son of God”. Martha knows that everything Jesus does flows out of who he is. But little does she realise she will see Jesus will call her brother out of the tomb.

Our faith teaches that it is only in relationship with Jesus that we hope for resurrection and eternal life. Jesus is the embodiment of this hope. The phrase from v25 “believes in me” takes on a whole different meaning if we accept that the original Greek for “in” actually means “into”. Faith in Christ, brings us into Christ. Those who come to Jesus in repentance and faith are united to Him-joined to Him, one with Him. Our union with Christ is the reason for our hope. We can rest in this promise. I believe the concept of union and eternal life in Christ are very closely linked.

Eugene Petersen writes that Jesus says to Martha “I am, right now, Resurrection and Life” v25. What a statement! I am ( from Yahweh the name God calls himself in the Old Testament), I am Resurrection and Life, not in the future but “right now”. Followers of Jesus can enter into resurrection life in Christ now. Be in union with Jesus right now. The implications of this are mind blowing. This is the revelation of Easter, the huge hope that Jesus’ resurrection gives us.

We don’t know how Mary and Martha felt as they saw their brother stagger out of the tomb! Overwhelmed, stunned, awestruck, flooded with joy. We can be sure they were changed from that moment on. Filled with utter amazement and immense gratitude. Lazarus was raised but Mary and Martha also received new life from Jesus !

Jesus, their friend, didn’t let them down.

Does this story change the way we think about Jesus? His compassion. His kindness. Can we trust that Jesus won’t let us down either? We only have to notice the spring flowers, after winter, to know that resurrection is real. Jesus wants to free us from the fear of death and lead us into greater life and freedom just as he did for Mary and Martha. United with Him in resurrection life we are secure. Amen