

October 2nd 2022

Martha

I am Martha, I live with my sister Mary and my younger brother Lazarus, in a town called Bethany. Bethany is 3 Kms from Jerusalem on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives. The house is mine. None of us is married which is a bit strange but one day we probably will be. We are all different, like all brothers and sisters. We get on well, we truly love each other. Like all families we annoy each other from time to time. We are Jewish, of course. Our nationality is Jewish and our religion is Jewish, Judaism. We are like everyone else are waiting for the Messiah. Mary, Lazarus and I think we have found him, his name is Jesus. We were attracted to him the first time we saw him in action. His preaching is amazing, not like our religious leaders - legalistic and boring, it is new and full of life. The sort of things he's done is turn water into wine, heal people, feed 5,000 people with 2 small loaves and 5 fishes, walk on water, make a blind man see, forgive sins. And he's given us a further clue as to who he is by saying things like I am the bread of life, I am the light of the world, I am the gate, I am the good shepherd, before Abraham was I am. He's become our good friend, we've had him over for dinner and he's even stayed the night.

Anyway enough of this thinking out loud, I must get on with the breakfast - barely loaves , cheese, figs. Mary tell Lazarus breakfast is ready. He's not coming down to breakfast, He's not feeling that well. Never mind I'm sure he'll be OK by lunch time. No lunch either, Dinner, still not feeling up to it.

Today Lazarus is still not feeling any better, in fact he is worse. Maybe I'll go to the chemist and get some medicine- we can afford it.

Today Lazarus is still not any better, that medicine hasn't helped. I wish Jesus was here. Mary I wish Jesus was here. Do you think we could get a message to Jesus to let him know how sick his friend Lazarus is. Yes that's a good idea Mary, we'll find a messenger. It'll take about a day for him to get where Jesus is. Do you think he's got the message yet ?You think he should have? Well in that case we should see him by the end of the day.

Mary, I've walked up and down the road, but there's still no sign of his coming. Do you think Jesus doesn't care. A couple of weeks ago he healed a random blind man by the side of the road. You'd think he would come and heal his very good friend. Maybe tomorrow...

Mary, Lazarus looks so ill, his temperature is so high and he's having trouble breathing, I think we ought to take it in turns to sit by his bedside. I'll do until midnight and then you can take over.

Martha, Martha he's gone. What do you mean he's gone? Lazarus' breathing got shallower and shallower and then it stopped. O no, lets just sit and hold each other and cry together sharing our grief , before the loud mourners come. If Jesus had been here our brother would not have died. Yes Martha you are right , If Jesus had been here our brother would not have died.

My acting skills do not run to displaying extreme grief but if you have lost a brother, or a sister or someone you love very much, you will know how Mary and I are feeling.

Mary we have jobs to do. I'll go and buy a tomb, we can afford a nice one. You get out the stuff for preparing Lazarus' body for burial.

Do you think Jesus knows Lazarus is dead? he probably won't come now , will he?

After all there's no point, or is there?

I've bought a nice tomb, its a cave with a rock. Expensive? Yes I know , but Lazarus is worth it.

I'll help you with the embalming process. it's good you've got all those perfumes and special linen strips. Why aren't you using this one, The really expensive one.? You're keeping it for a special occasion! What could be more special than this occasion? You don't know, but you are not going to use it. Ok that's fine Mary, forget I mentioned it.

I've just heard Jesus is coming, I'll run as fast as I can to meet him.

Lord if you'd had been here my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.

Your brother will rise again.

I know he will rise again at the last day.

Listen to what Jesus is saying...I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me, though he were dead yet shall he live. And whosoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this.?

What does he mean? Does he mean the resurrection has moved from the last day into the present day? Does he mean this life will start now and will go on forever? If we believe.

Lord, I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is to come into the world.

I've got to go and get Mary. Mary, the teacher is here and is asking for you. Mary is jumping up and running off to find Jesus. Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died. Exactly the same words that I used.

Jesus is saying, show me where you have laid him. Come and see Lord.

Mary is crying, I am crying, our friends are all crying and now Jesus is crying. Is he crying in sympathy with us, or is he crying for a deeper reason. Is he crying at the ugliness of death itself. We've got to the tomb. Jesus is saying, Take away the stone. NO! don't do that. By now there will be a smell, Lazarus has been dead 4 days. Jesus is saying did I not tell you, that if you believe you will see the glory of God. The men took no notice of me, they did what Jesus told them to do. They kept on rolling the stone away.

(Deep breath,) No smell, I wonder what that means.

All eyes are fixed on the hole where the stone was. LAZARUS COME OUT

(Lean forward) I can see a shadow, something moving. Something white against the blackness. It's Lazarus!!

Alive and well, are my eyes playing tricks with me. He can hardly walk because of the strips of linen we put around his body. And there was a special cloth around his face. Jesus is saying, take off the grave clothes and let him go. So with trembling hands we take off the grave clothes and the 3 of us are walking home with a great crowd following us. We have never stopped talking about what had happened. We are trying to get life back to normal. Bethany is full of people wanting to catch a glimpse of Lazarus, the man who was dead and is now alive.

It is 6 days before the Passover. There's a steady stream of people travelling up to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival. Jesus is coming to Bethany. I'm putting on a party to celebrate Lazarus being alive again. I've asked Jesus and his disciples. I enjoy catering for a bit of a crowd. Everything is going really well. Everyone is enjoying my food, the wine is flowing, the company is good, we are so grateful to have Lazarus back with us. It's beyond words how thankful to Jesus we are.

What's Mary up too.? She's got that expensive jar of perfume in her hand - the one she decided not to use on Lazarus. I think I can see what she's doing, she breaking the jar open and pouring it over Jesus' feet. Why does she have to mess up my dinner parties? And now she is letting down her hair and wiping Jesus' feet with her hair. Strange thing to do, but I have to say it's a beautiful smell, the fragrance has filled the whole house. Judas, the group's treasurer is attacking Mary. Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus is quick to defend Mary and her action. Leave her alone, he said, It was intended she keep this perfume for the day of my burial. Burial? Does Mary know something I don't? You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.

O dear, where's he going?

The most amazing and wonderful event that has ever happened to me has polarised people, dividing them into two camps. Those who believe Jesus is the Messiah and those who don't believe. The raising to life of my beloved brother has become a political football. The religious leaders would prefer it had never happened. They would prefer that my brother was dead. In fact I've heard they are plotting to kill him. They are also plotting to kill Jesus.

I have a bad feeling about all this.

I am thinking it will not end well.

I can see the black clouds gathering.

Even Jesus when my sister anointed his feet with that expensive perfume said she did it for my burial. His burial- you don't have a burial without a death.

I live in turbulent and confusing times, so much going on.

What has happened? Sickness, death, life, a new even more wonderful sort of life. I've also seen greed, jealousy, political intrigue in high places.

What has happened within me because of what has happened.? That is the question I need to ask myself.

What would I say to Jesus today? This is what I would say. I always believed resurrection life would be available on the last day, but now I know resurrection life is available to me now, the future has moved into the present because you have come. And you have proved it to me by bringing my brother back to life.

Listen again to what Jesus said to me.

I am the resurrection and the life. he who believes in me though he was dead , yet shall he live. And whosoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? Let us pray.

Prayer. Thank you Lord, that John recorded this story in his gospel. We thank you for the faith of the 2 sisters Mary and Martha, we thank you for the witness of Lazarus, the man that was dead and is alive. We thank you that this story is a sign, a signpost pointing us to an even greater story. Amen

Sing Because he lives

Benediction Maurice