

Encounters with Jesus V - Martha

My brother Lazarus died recently, for a second time.

The story's an interesting one—at least I think it's interesting. You see, Jesus was a close friend of mine. He was close to me, my sister Mary, and my brother Lazarus. And somehow we ended up near the center of the controversy that he always seemed to stir up.

Maybe I should go back to the beginning though, shortly after we'd met him. He ended up coming over to my home for a meal. It was an exciting time for us, but it was also really stressful. There are so many details that a woman has to worry about when she's hosting. And hosting Jesus! Well, that takes it to a whole other level. So anyway, I was racing around like a chicken with my head cut off, trying to get everything ready. Mary was very little help. She's prone to daydreaming anyway, but when she heard Jesus was coming she was useless! She was supposed to be cleaning up the dining area, and I walked through five times while she was just standing in the same place, wiping down a table.

Anyway, I had just gotten the last item in place when Jesus and his followers knocked on the door. From then on, I was busy serving people food and drink and making sure everyone was taken care of. At one point, I got very upset. And this is embarrassing, but I think you should know the whole story. But I was upset because Mary wasn't helping me at all. And where do you think she was? Sitting at Jesus's feet, just listening to everything he had to say. Not only was it unusual for a woman to be in a dining room with men, it was unheard of for her to be seated at his feet, like a disciple. But this was one of the most amazing things. When I complained to Jesus that she wasn't helping me, this is what he said:

"Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."†

Just like that, he put me in my place. But Jesus didn't relegate me to the kitchen like other teachers would have. No, our place, mine and Mary's, was at his feet, as disciples. What an extraordinary thing!

Our relationship continued then. We learned many things from Jesus, and I believe we became special friends. And then our brother Lazarus died. We sent word to Jesus right away, but he didn't come until Lazarus had already been buried for four days. Four long days. We had the funeral and we wrapped Lazarus's body, and we placed him in the tomb. We were in the middle of our week of mourning, and Mary was taking it very hard. She takes everything to heart.

So on the fourth day after Lazarus was buried, I heard that Jesus had returned to town. So I ran out to meet him. I marched right up to him and I said, "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 replied, "Your brother will rise again."‡

I said, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."‡

And then Jesus said, "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?"‡

"Yes, Lord," I said, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."‡

After that, I ran to get my sister. I pulled her out of the house and told her that Jesus was there. When we left the house, all the people followed. When Mary got to the edge of the village, where Jesus was, she ran up to him and flung herself at his feet, weeping. "Lord," she sobbed, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died." †

Jesus asked to be shown where Lazarus was laid, and then he wept. People were amazed at how much he loved Lazarus, but some were saying that he should have kept Lazarus from dying.

Jesus ordered that the stone be rolled away from the tomb's opening. I objected of course, "But, Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." †

And he said to me, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" †

So the people got the stone out of the way, and Jesus prayed, "'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.'" †

And then he looked at the tomb and he said in the strongest voice I have ever heard, "Lazarus, come out." †

And he did! My brother came out, wrapped in grave clothes. We couldn't even see his face. But he was there, and he was alive!

From that day on, people started talking about killing Lazarus. And they kept talking about killing Jesus too.

We had many more meals with Jesus. Instead of serving them, I, too, sat at Jesus's feet to listen. Shortly before Jesus was crucified, Mary poured out a whole year's worth of expensive oil on Jesus's feet. I think it was her way of showing how extravagantly she loved Jesus.

We were among those who mourned Jesus's death and who celebrated his resurrection from the dead. My sister and I love to tell the stories of those resurrections. Jesus's resurrection from the dead and his power over death is even sweeter to us now that Lazarus is dead again and we have to look forward to the final resurrection to be reunited with him and with Jesus.

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† Quotations taken from Luke 10.

‡ Quotations taken from John 11.

Martha's story can be found in Luke 10 and John 11. The portions that are not quoted from the Bible are a fictionalized account of Martha and her family that is based on the Bible and commentaries that interpret and explain their story.

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Discussion Questions

- What did you notice about this story?
- What did you wonder about?

- What did you think about Mary & Martha & the different ways they approached Jesus?
- Why do you think Jesus allowed women to be his disciples, even though that wasn't normal for the culture?
- Do you think that Martha was asking Jesus to heal her brother Lazarus?
- Do you think she believed that he would raise Lazarus from the dead?

- What about Mary? Why do you think she threw herself at Jesus's feet?
- Why do you think Jesus resurrected Lazarus?

- What do you think Lazarus's resurrected life was like?
- What do you think it means that Jesus had the power to do that?

- What do you think this adds to your understanding of life and death?
- What does it add to your understanding of spiritual life and death?
- How do you think Jesus knew that God would raise Lazarus from the dead when he prayed to God?

Describe or draw a picture of your spiritual existence. Is it alive or dead? Invite Jesus to bring abundant spiritual life to you.