

Notes from After the Sermon Martha Calling Jesus!

Last week our Scripture reading, Luke 10:38-43, showed us the different personalities of Martha and Mary. Martha was the worker, the doer, the older sister who knew what tradition required of her. Mary was the contemplative one, the one who ignored tradition to sit and learn from Jesus. Martha, angry at her sister, asked Jesus to tell Mary to get up, get moving, and help Martha. How did Jesus respond? He told Martha that Mary had “chosen the better part.”

So now we come to John 11. We don't know how much has passed between the 2 events, but it could not have been long. Both events were early in Jesus's ministry. So, months, a year maybe. And we don't know if there were any other encounters between Jesus and Martha – there may have been given where they lived, but we aren't told.

But now disaster has struck. Lazarus is ill and is dying. We know from last week that Martha and her family had money – so you can bet the doctors have already visited and done what they could. Nothing has helped, so in desperation, verse 3 tells us that the sisters sent word to Jesus. They knew Jesus loved Lazarus, they stated so in the word they sent. Certainly, Jesus would come right away when He heard. Certainly, Jesus would answer their prayer. But there was just silence. Can you imagine the sisters as first the hours and then the days go by? Jesus got our message, we know He did. He heard the news – we told it plainly that Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, was dying. Why isn't Lazarus getting better? Why doesn't Jesus come? And then Lazarus dies. And yet, more day's pass until finally word comes that Jesus is on His way.

So, Martha – take charge Martha – what does she do? She hears Jesus is coming and verse 20 says she went to meet Jesus while Mary stayed at home. This time Martha is the one breaking with tradition. She should be home with her family – guests have come to pay their respects, she needs to be at home saying and doing the expected things. In fact, according to strict Jewish rules of the time, the family of a deceased person stayed at home for 7 days, sitting barefoot on the floor or on a bench. We are told Lazarus has been in the tomb for 4 days – so Martha is

not supposed to leave her home. But Martha is not going to just play by the rules this time. She leaves her house and goes to meet Jesus.

And how does Martha greet Jesus? Look at verses 21-22. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” What a statement of faith! Not only does she call Jesus “Lord” but she simply states as fact, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” She knows what Jesus can do, but death seems terribly final. Four days have passed after all, there is a significance to the four days. In the custom of that time, the 3rd day after burial the body would be inspected to make sure the person was dead. So that task would have been done. Is there a hint of anger or frustration in Martha’s voice? She would have been entitled, right? Except look at what Martha says next, “But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Incredible words of faith.

Jesus even pushes Martha a bit in verses 25-26. And what is Martha’s response to Jesus’s question as to her belief? “Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” Our Martha has come a long way! Did you know these were the same words the apostle Peter said in Mark 8:29? On the strength of his answer, Peter went on to become the rock on which the church would be built. Martha’s faith and understanding of Jesus was at least equal to that of Peter.

We can learn from Martha that faith grows and matures. Just because our faith has not been strong in the past, may not be strong today, doesn’t mean it can’t be strong tomorrow. Martha’s faith grew by listening to what Jesus had to say to her in Luke 10 – taking it to heart and making a change. We can hear God’s word as well – through prayer, through reading God’s word, through a sermon or a song. And we can also learn from Martha that faith sometimes requires patience and confidence in God even when we have questions and fears, and want an answer NOW. Let Martha be your guide to a deep and lasting faith in a God who will not let you down.

But, of course, the Scripture continues. Lazarus is raised from the dead, and because of that the faith of Martha and Mary is confirmed and strengthened, as was the faith of the disciples. And verse 45 tells us that many Jews, who saw Lazarus come forth, also believed in Him. By raising Lazarus from the dead, we are given the ability to strengthen and confirm our faith as well.