

Thought for the day – Monday 17th October 2022

Mary, Martha and Lazarus

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We had a great bible study via zoom last night, reading about Jesus relationship with a very special family to him, a brother and two younger sisters.

Lazarus, Martha and Mary are well known bible names to us and as amazing as Lazarus' story is, we get an equally memorable story of the two sisters!

What do you think of when you think of Martha and Mary? Here below is an interesting take on that famous interaction with Jesus when Martha asked him to get Mary to start helping with the hospitality, and he didn't comply!

It's taken from a recent article in Woman Alive magazine by Elaine Storkey, below is the excerpt, but here's a link to the whole article, which is very easy to read and won't take more than a few minutes, - <https://www.womanalive.co.uk/martha-and-mary-learning-to-simplify/13559.article>

I'd encourage you to get a cuppa and your favourite biscuit and have a 5 minute break sometime today and have a read!!

EXCCERPT

In Luke's account of Jesus' visit, we have just been told that Mary had settled down close to Jesus' feet and was listening intently to what he was teaching. The J.B. Phillips translation then says: "But Martha was very worried about her elaborate preparations and she burst in, saying, 'Lord, don't you mind that my sister has left me to do everything by myself? Tell her to get up and help me!' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, my dear, you are worried and bothered about providing so many things. Only a few things are really needed, perhaps only one'" (vv40-42).

Early Christian writers like Cyril of Alexandria didn't see this remark as Jesus rebuking Martha for her assumed lack of spirituality. Nor did they think he was driving a wedge between the sisters. They believed that Jesus was more bothered that Martha was wearing herself out, quite unnecessarily.

He was actually talking about the meal! The phrase "only a few things are really needed" suggests Jesus wanted a simple meal rather than something that demanded exhausting preparations. He was actually trying to wean Martha off her over-the-top hospitality.

Effectively he was saying something like: "Come on, Martha dear. We haven't come for a banquet with half a dozen courses. Only a few things are necessary, perhaps even just one. So a bowl of soup and some bread will be quite sufficient!"

This is not a story about work against faith, worldly affairs against spiritual meditation or independence against submission. Nor is about sisterly competitiveness. It is about excess. Jesus was asking Martha not to take on more than she needed to.

She was rebuked, not because she was choosing to provide hospitality rather than hear Jesus' teaching, but because the hospitality she was providing was way beyond what was needed. Jesus was saying she should keep it simple, then she'd have less stress and anxiety and be able to sit down and join Mary, rather than telling her off.

What can we learn from the story today?

I hope we will learn what Mary learned, that sitting at the feet of Jesus to hear God's word is a very good place to be. But we can learn a lot also from Martha, and what Jesus taught her.

We should follow him in simplicity and faith; there is no need to place unnecessary burdens on ourselves and others. Jesus is the one who lifts our burdens, rather than weighing us down. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

How often do we punish ourselves by taking on more than we can cope with, and then feel resentful and irritable towards others rather than glad to serve? Even worse, how often does our need to be in control, to do things our way, leave us with spoiled relationships because others don't want to be pushed into doing what we want?

Martha's motivation was to bless her guests with a wonderful meal. But she went over the top and ended up neglecting the very relationships she was trying to enhance – those with her sister, Jesus and his friends.

If we're finding that serving God has become a burden, we might want to look again at the things we have taken on and perhaps the complexities we have landed ourselves in.

Sometimes our anxiety is linked to being simply overwhelmed with the responsibilities we face because of the choices we make. It is good for all of us to hear what Jesus said to Martha: "only a few things are necessary, perhaps only one" and then ask God afresh to show us what these things are in our own lives.