

**29<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death.  
Breathe upon us with the power of your Spirit,  
that we may be raised to new life in Christ,  
and serve you in holiness and righteousness all our days:  
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Luke 10:38-41**

**John 11:1-45**

Martha and her sister have gone down in history as 2 sisters who argued. I wonder how fair that really is. It's just that we don't know much more about them. Or do we?

It seems that Martha initiated what you might see as the 1<sup>st</sup> argument and she even tried to enlist Jesus to support her. Isn't it interesting that instead of refusing to be drawn into someone else's dispute he actually was willing to give his opinion and supported the other sister? So round 1, it seems, went to Mary.

But is it about an argument with one party being right and the other being wrong, or is it about breaking new ground in the presence and power and love of Jesus? Against all the received wisdom of the day, the expected rules for hospitality and the acceptable roles for women, here, for the 1<sup>st</sup> time, women were included in their own right as students, as scholars, as people entitled to listen and learn and discuss and express an opinion, and to be part of the male intellectual elite. Jesus said it was perfectly acceptable for women to be learners and followers for themselves in their own right. There was an argument and the outcome was ground-breaking in the presence and the power and the love of Jesus.

The next argument we find Martha involved in is not with her sister but with Jesus – for not responding to their cry for help, for not coming sooner, for not doing anything at all about it and therefore for not even seeming to care about these people who had been such good friends to him. But is it an argument with one party being right and one being wrong? I have to say that if it is then Jesus is entirely in the wrong and guilty as charged! Isn't he? Or is it about breaking new ground – in the presence and the power and the love of Jesus?

So easily overlooked in amongst the heightened emotionally charged account is a great statement of faith: 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who was to come into the world' Who says it? Martha says it.

Simon Peter on a very different occasion in different company gets all the credit for declaring that Jesus is the Christ. And that was after he had done something astoundingly miraculous.

But here is Martha in the midst of her grief and righteous anger, in the presence of death and in the absence of a miracle, is Martha's declaration of faith. And Martha also says: 'If you had been here my brother would not have died. And I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask'

So, is it about an argument with one of them being wrong and one being right? Or is it about breaking new ground in the presence and the power and the love of Jesus?

Here, against all the medical evidence, and all the grief and despair and finality, and all the effects of a hot climate on a very dead body 4 days old a man is brought back to life and restored to his sisters, his friends and his community. There was an argument and Jesus was involved and the outcome was ground-breaking in the presence and the power and the love of Jesus.

So there we have her, Martha the patron saint of housewives, waiters and waitresses, apparently, whereas she ought to be the patron saint of people of great faith and breaking ground in the midst of conflict and against all the odds. But maybe the message is that housewives and waiters and waitresses i.e. ordinary women and men can also be people of great faith and breaking ground in the midst of conflict and against all the odds.

Thanks be to God.

**To be in your presence,**

to sit at your feet,  
where your love surrounds me,  
and makes me complete:

*This is my desire, O Lord,  
this is my desire.*

*This is my desire, O Lord,  
this is my desire.*

To rest in your presence,  
not rushing away,  
to cherish each moment —  
here I would stay.

Noël Richards (b. 1955)

We pray for all who weep today:

for those who grieve and mourn for the loss of loved ones – husbands, wives,  
mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, brothers, sisters, friends...

**Lord, weep with us and bring fresh hope.**

We pray for those who care for people at the end of their earthly lives: chaplains,  
hospice workers, nurses, doctors, carers, pastors, undertakers...

Give them strength, courage, empathy and love as they walk with those who weep.

**Lord, weep with us and bring fresh hope.**

We pray for broken relationships where there seems to be no hope;

for families destroyed by death, poverty, war, violence, or abuse;

for those who feel let down by society and for those who feel let down by you –  
may all know your presence in those dark times.

As they wait on you, comfort them, Lord, we pray.

**Lord, weep with us and bring fresh hope.**

**Amen.**