GRACE
LUTHERAN
CHURCH

October 25 – Martha of Bethany

The Gospel reading starts as Jesus arrives. Earlier in the text, we learn that Jesus is warned that his friend Lazarus is sick enough he could die. Jesus does not go to see him. Again, a messenger comes and says that Lazarus has died. Again, Jesus waits. Then we have Jesus finally arriving in Bethany and Martha comes out to meet him. Given that context, we can relate to her response, "Lord, if only you had been here my brother would not have died."

I don't believe for a moment that I am the only one who has wondered, "why?" at the loss of a loved one. "Why did it have to be like that?" "Why cancer?" It is completely natural to think that way, and it is an easy transition into "Lord, if only you had been here." It is easy to get caught up in bargaining. Martha did. We all do.

When we think of Martha of Bethany, what usually comes to mind? More often than not, we think of her as the one who is tending to the house and hospitality while Mary sits as Jesus' feet. We think of Martha as the sister who is always busy. Some even paint her in a bad light, as if she is too busy to really see what is happening around her. This text paints a very different picture.

Martha does start with the short rebuke, "If only you were here," but immediately moves into a profound statement of faith. She knows that Jesus only has to say the word, to ask for it, and Lasarus will live again. She tells Jesus that he can do this and Jesus acknowledges this with the oft quoted, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, they shall live." These words of Jesus are prompted by Martha's faith. It is easy to overlook this due to all that is happening in the text. It is Martha that sparks this conversation, meeting Jesus in the driveway with a short rebuke and a long statement professing her faith.

How many of you remembered Martha as saying, "Lord, if only you had been here"? Now, being honest, how many of you remembered what she said next before you heard it read today? For many of us, our assumptions about people lead us to only see and hear what we want to see and hear. It makes too much sense for Martha to meet Jesus and the end of the driveway, rebuke him, and then get back to tending to the guests. But that is not what happens.

It is easy to overlook Martha's faith when we make assumptions about her. If she is that busy, she misses out. Instead, this "worker bee" becomes a beacon of faith, leading even Jesus into acknowledging in plain terms that he is the resurrection and the life. Martha is one of the very first witnesses, proclaiming her faith out loud before most of the disciples.

If you look at the history of Christianity, we find several stories of the "Marthas" of the world making a difference through faith and proclamation. Even on this Sunday, we celebrate Martin Luther and the Reformation. It all started with a bookworm, a nerd, who spoke out in faith at a time many were silent. The same is found throughout the history of the church, unlikely people seeing God through the clearest lens.

Faith is not about believing when everything goes the way you want it to. Faith is believing when it gets difficult. It is believing even when you do not know what lies ahead. May we all learn from Martha and lean into faith and allow that faith to be our solid foundation. It doesn't have to be a grand gesture. She simply told Jesus that she believes in him, and it impacted Jesus deeply. May we also have to courage to let God know that we believe, and stand in that faith, regardless of the response. May we learn from Martha. Amen.

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