

When Lazarus became gravely ill, Martha and I sent for Jesus. If anyone could save our brother, it would be him. We'd seen so many miracles, so many healings, and we were confident that he would simply perform another, and everything would be all right again.

But the Master didn't come. The healing didn't eventuate, and Lazarus died. We anointed his body, wrapped it in burial bandages and placed it in the family tomb, sealing it with a large stone. I hoped against hope that Jesus would arrive at least for the funeral, but he didn't appear. By the fourth day I couldn't face the wailing of the professional mourners any more, and stayed in the house, grieving in my own way. My life had become flat and colourless, and having to deal with those who came to offer condolences was beyond me.

When Martha came to tell me that Jesus had arrived and was asking for me, I was torn between anger and love. I wanted to rage at him for not being here when we needed him the most, but knew him well enough to know that his love for us would still be there. So all I could manage to say was, "Master, if only you had been here my brother would not have died."*

I knew about, and believed in, the resurrection at the end of time, but it seemed to be a far off event, too remote to penetrate my grief, so at this point I had no idea what I expected of the Master. Perhaps I thought he could grieve with us and in his deep compassion console us as we shared stories of our brother and wept for him and for our loss. It seemed to be the only possible thing that was left to do. And, in fact, when I said I would take him to the tomb, he did weep. Some of those around us said, "Look how much he loved Lazarus!" But others voiced what I had been feeling - "If he had come sooner he could have prevented this. After all, he did heal a blind man a couple of months back. Another healing should have been easy."

It was clear that Jesus was agitated and angered by their criticism, but moved with compassion at the same time. When we came to the tomb he told the men to remove the stone. Martha said, "Master, by this time there's a stench. He's been dead for four days!"* His reply was stern. He said, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"* He then prayed, "Father, I'm grateful that you have listened to me. I know you always do listen, but on account of this crowd standing here I've spoken so that they might believe that you sent me."* He told them again to remove the stone. Then he shouted, "Lazarus, come out!"

To our amazement our brother appeared, wrapped from head to toe, with a cloth over his face. Jesus then told us to unwrap him, and let him loose.

How can I describe the scene that followed? We did as we were told, and hugged our brother and kissed him. Then we worshiped this incredible man who made it all possible. His response was practical: "Lazarus must be hungry, and so am I. Why don't we celebrate over a meal."

And so we did. Martha did herself proud in the kitchen, and after giving thanks for the food and new life, there was much laughter and joy shared around the table.

Later we asked Lazarus what it was like, this dying and rising. He told us he couldn't remember. He said that as he slipped into death he felt incredibly peaceful, and the next thing he knew he was woken from what seemed to be a deep sleep by a loud voice - much the same as when our mother used to rouse us children when we overslept, and should have been up and out, doing our chores. And then there he was, blinking in the bright sunlight and being freed from the bandages that restricted his movements. In fact, he said he felt more alive and free than ever before.

Martha also shared with us something that Jesus had said to her. Like me, she had confessed a belief in the resurrection at the

end of time, and his reply was, "You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all."* Then he asked her, "Do you believe this?" Her reply was, "Yes Master. All along I have believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who comes into the world."*

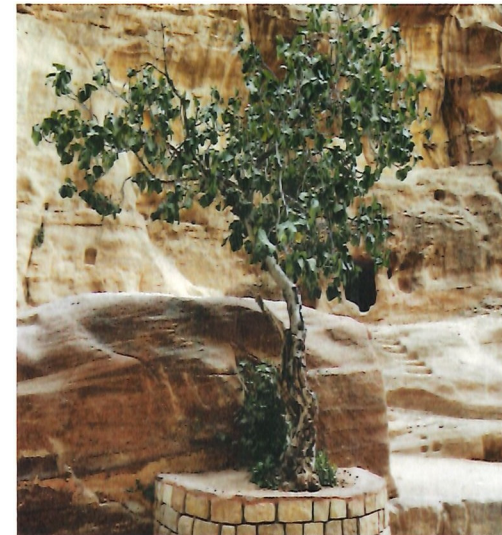
What a profound statement! 'I am the resurrection and Life.' Having seen our dead brother raised to life by this man, we had glimpsed the meaning of Jesus words, but it was nothing compared to what was to come later, when the cycle of death and resurrection would be played out in Jesus himself. I suppose what we had witnessed should have prepared us for what was to come, but even so, there was much more to experience, much more to learn about our friend and Saviour. And death, even in the midst of faith, is still not easy to deal with.

But that's another story for another time.

* *The Message bible*

Lazarus rising - Mary's account

John 11:1-44



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