



St Marylebone  
*Parish Church*

**Trinity 5 2019 11 am**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

If our natural sympathies are with anyone in this morning's Gospel reading, they must surely be with poor old Martha.

Jesus has come to call at the village home of his friends just outside Jerusalem and, when all is said and done:

somebody has fetch provisions,

somebody has to ensure that rooms are ready,

somebody has to lay the tables,

somebody has see to all the practicalities of having a guest to stay.

Most of us have been there, and things are not that much different today from what they were two thousand years ago.

We know what it feels like to be the 'Martha' in the unexpected house-guest situation.

Poor old Martha, ‘worried and distracted by so many things’; understandably overwhelmed and, obviously, unappreciated.

Where is Mary, anyway, when she is needed - or even Lazarus come to that?

St Luke records a very real domestic scene: an episode full of the tensions and frustrations of everyday family life.

Mary, it would appear, has left her very capable, practical and dependable sister to get on with things whilst she entertains their guest, or rather - whilst she sits at Jesus’ feet listening to his every word.

Very cleverly, St Luke invites us into that Bethany home; draws us into the scene and very quickly we can identify with those who are there.

So where *are* you in this first century Palestinian dinner party?

Are you busy with Martha in the kitchen, tidying-up as you go along, supervising the servants, tasting the dishes before they are brought to the table?

Or, are you sitting quietly, attentively with Mary, hanging on Jesus every word, ‘lost in wonder, love and praise’?

Whilst Jesus says that it is Mary who has ‘chosen the better part’, the truth is that he needed a Martha too!

Mary might be the one soaking up his every word, focused and attentive, but Jesus has come to their home because he needs

a roof over his head, a bed for the night and water with which he can wash and food and drink to sustain him.

Mary is only able to spend 'quality time' with Jesus because Martha rolls up her sleeves, dons her pinny, and gets on with things!

Martha is the 'homemaker', the sibling who creates and sustains the home, the safe haven to which Jesus keeps on returning whenever he is in Jerusalem; the home which is, for St Luke, the Church in microcosm.

Here is the place where the man whom Jesus had raised from the dead lives the Kingdom life.

And here too is Mary, listening to Jesus; receptive and open to the Gospel, filled with joy; reflecting and contemplating and praying - fully engaged in her active discernment of the divine will.

But what about poor old Martha, busily shopping and buying and planning and preparing and cooking and serving?

Yes, Mary might indeed 'have [had] the better part', but it is in their common life *together*, gathered, sharing a meal, living the Kingdom, attentive to other's needs and listening to Jesus that the Church is to be found.

St Luke fills his gospel with these wonderful, vibrant, word pictures, and here we have one of his very best: the Church as a dynamic gathered community, two or three gathered

together in his name, a Eucharistic people, living hospitable, servant lives filled with God's divine grace.

The Bethany home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha is, says St Luke, to be the model of Church for all his readers. St Luke invites all who read his words – and that includes us – to form their Church communities, form this our Church community centred on Jesus, rooted in a meal and lived in active service of others, formed and sustained by God's grace.

Church communities in which, like Lazarus, we live in the power of the Resurrection, not only attentive the words of Jesus like Mary, but aware to the needs of others like Martha.

Jesus doesn't praise Mary for her introverted piety, nor does he condemn Martha for her extroverted, distracted busyness; what Jesus does, is to invite them both, to make him the very centre of their lives, so that each might live the life of the Kingdom.

Through God's grace, as we gather together as his Church in this place, may Christ be the centre of our lives and may St Marylebone, like the welcoming home at Bethany, be a place of tangible love and welcome and be at the service of others. Amen.