

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2025, Luke 10. 38, Colossians and Genesis

I have always found the closed orders for Nuns and Monks a strange concept. The inability to share one's faith with the rest of society, to live out the life Jesus led, or at least to try and live out the life he led, is one I can't completely get my head around. This meeting of Jesus and the two sisters is perhaps a nod to the fact that we should all be more prayerful and less busy. That perhaps our spiritual food should far outweigh, or at least equal, our actual food.

Martha and Mary are clearly very different characters, but before we set judgement on their actions, and then our own actions and those around us, we perhaps must put into context the setting of the story. Jesus is off to Jerusalem, he is going off towards his death and he knows that time is short. There is an urgency behind the text that is not always apparent if you don't know where it sits in the life of Jesus. The fact that Jesus's death is imminent perhaps helps make sense of his response to the two sisters, which otherwise could seem a little unfair.

After all it is Martha who welcomes him into their home. It is Martha who gets on with the housework and makes the meal, whilst Mary just sits down at Jesus's feet and listens to him. Jesus's judgement of Martha is not a condemnation of her work, but more a comment on her being so distracted and not being still to listen to what he has to say. Martha allows herself to be taken up with the necessary, but perhaps not vital, tasks rather than spending precious moments listening to what the Lord is saying. One can only surmise that if Martha knew that this was to be the last time she was to see Jesus alive, then she may perhaps have stopped and listened. Mary. On the other hand, somehow realises the importance of the visit, she recognises that perhaps this opportunity won't come again, and she realises that her chores can wait, but being with Jesus can't.

There could be another side to this story. Perhaps Martha had stopped her housework at the beginning of Jesus's visit, and when she realised that Jesus was talking about his death and that this was to be the last time they would meet, she got up and said 'rubbish, you'll be back around soon enough and if I'm not so busy on your next visit we can chat then'. The third scenario could have been that Martha didn't want to believe that Jesus was going to die, and took herself away and tried to keep herself busy so she didn't have to think about it. How often do we do that? When there's some bad news that we don't want to believe we go off and do things so we don't have to think about it, we metaphorically speaking bury our head in the ground.

We are perhaps all like Martha in not wanting to face up to the thought of Jesus on the cross, on the thought that perhaps we should be leading a sacrificial life like Jesus. How much of your present daily life is trying to busy yourself with things that don't involve sacrifice, don't involve following Jesus's life.

And yet a fourth scenario might exist. We associate Martha and Mary with their brother Lazurus, however this reading does not mention Lazurus and concentrates solely on the two women, another example of Jesus trying to change the view that the women were not important. A man going into the home of two single women could have been misunderstood by the neighbours, and Martha didn't want anything to do with the rumours that might have been started by the net curtain twitching brigade living around her. She busies herself in the kitchen and prepares food, but also prepares herself an alibi if anybody mentions what was going on in the house. Honest guv, I wasn't there, I was in the kitchen cooking.

By going into a woman's home, by wanting to stay and talk with them, by wanting them to stop and listen, are all indicators of Jesus normalising and

equalling up the huge male and female divide. Many still see this story as one about a fallen woman and her harassed sister, but if we take the context of the story seriously, Jesus' words to Martha are a clear call for us all to put discipleship above everything else. We need to spend more time in just being, rather than always doing. However my feeling of uncertainty about closed orders, those who are always being, still doesn't sit comfortably with me. I have got to realise that their being perhaps makes up for the rest of us who are far happier and more comfortable in prioritising doing.

We must learn to be more like a combined Martha and Mary, rather than just a Martha or a Mary. To be or not to be might be the question, the answer is to do both.