



SUNDAY 29 MARCH 2020

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

5th Sunday of Lent (A): John 11: 1-45

People come into our lives. Some of the chance meetings, the one-off contacts, become so much more and can clearly be gifted occasions leading to ongoing meetings central to the rest of our lives. The wonder and mystery of what and who brings us into contact with one another sometimes looks like God's Providence.

Today's famous Gospel story of the raising of Lazarus can begin a journey of the imagination. We're usually short of detail in our Scripture stories but this one leaves some clues worth pursuing and attracting some speculation.

Lazarus lives in the village of Bethany with his two sisters, Martha and Mary. These two women also appear in another Gospel story, so we know something about them (Luke 10:38-42). But it appears from today's Gospel story that Mary is identified with the woman in the story of Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee. She anointed Jesus' feet, wept over his feet and wiped away her tears with her hair (Luke 7:36-50).

In the story Luke gives us above in chapter 10, Martha welcomes Jesus into her house and makes a meal for him. Mary sits at Jesus' feet listening to him. Was this Mary the one from the house of Simon the Pharisee who had 'been forgiven much'? Was this not the first time Jesus had come into contact with Mary and possibly Martha? Had a great friendship developed between these woman and Jesus for what he had done for them?

Lazarus, their brother, does not appear until today's story of his illness and death. When Jesus is sent for, their message comes to us as 'Lord, the man you love is ill'. We know nothing about Lazarus, but it is unusual for him to be living with his two sisters in a house described as belonging to Mary, not to him. Lazarus never speaks. Jesus loves him. Was he someone with a range of needs and was being cared for by his sisters? Did Jesus go to their house at Bethany when in the area because of Lazarus? It throws a new light on the story. People who care for others with special needs offer the possible interpretation that Jesus was showing great love of Lazarus who was being cared for because he couldn't live an independent life. One day we'll find out.

Did Mary once come to Jesus to be freed from her sins? Did she then introduce him to Martha and to their brother, Lazarus? Did he visit their house to show God's love for someone with special needs? It would appear from Luke's story that they regarded Jesus as a great friend. His non appearance when sent for because of Lazarus' illness was hurtful to these women. When he did come he set Lazarus free in more ways than one - he brought him back into life. It was an emotional meeting with Martha and Mary - Jesus wept. It was a time their faith, their relationship with Jesus was tested and it didn't make sense. You may have had times life that. What you see in the story may be very personal for many reasons. Like many, listen to what's going on. It may be a lead into a deeper faith and new life.



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Some thoughts for reflection

"There is only one kind of relevance - and that is the relevance to the deep needs of people, to the places where they hurt and hope, curse and pray and hunger for meaning and significant relationships" - J Howard Clinebell

"The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts." - paragraph 1 of the 2nd Vatican Council document on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes).

"The person who attempts to act or do things for others or for the world without deepening his or her self-understanding, freedom, integrity and capacity to love, will not have anything to give others. He or she will communicate nothing but the contagion of his or her own obsessions, aggressions, ego-centred ambitions, delusions about the ends and means, doctrinaire prejudices and ideas". - Thomas Merton (monk)

"You are not making a gift of what is yours to the person who is poor, but you are giving them back what belongs to them. You have been appropriating things that are meant for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich". - St Ambrose