

# Martha's Story





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**Fire**



**Martha – To Mark, my oldest son. You inspired this story. My gifted fixer. Gatherer of people, family, friends, strangers alike. You are more like me than you realise.**

## Martha's Story

Our Father Abraham led the way in hospitality and our household honoured that tradition no matter who stopped by. It is said that when the three strangers turned up outside Abraham's tent, he immediately went out to meet them and begged them not to go any further without washing off the dust from road and drinking water for their continued journey. The three men of God agreed to Abraham doing them such a service and sat down to rest beside the tree outside the tent. I had been told this story as a little girl and I watched as our mother and father treated strangers the same way. All our lives we had watched hospitality played out in our home, time and time again and so when I began running my own house, I honoured what they taught me.

My name is Martha. I live here in Bethany just 2 miles from Jerusalem with my brother Lazarus and my sister Mary. I am very blessed and have a large household with many servants, livestock and buildings that house us all. I have land and barns and as farmers our workday never ends. But we all muck in and have our chores to do.

My mother and father had a great reputation here in Bethany for their generous hospitality. Our house was always full of guests. Some became great friends, others were just passing through, but always we had an unwritten rule, treat the stranger as the honoured guest never just add them to the table. Abraham in that childhood story had done the same he didn't just say to his guests 'pull up a chair we were thinking about eating anyway'. No, he got them water to wash their feet to make them comfortable again. He gave them clean water to drink for the travellers would have been thirsty in the heat of the day. He wasn't finished there, Abraham didn't want to rush them away so he went to Sarah's tent and instructed her to bake bread, he selected a calf and added curds and milk when it had been prepared so they could eat at their leisure under the tree. These guests were honoured, housed, fed, and protected during the time that they spent with Abraham and

we in this household chose to serve the Lord God in the same way. We have known the Lord God as Jehovah Jirah and so we share what He provides for us with others.

As this is my household, I make sure that the house runs smoothly although that was not a hard task as all of the women worked tirelessly in this family business. The women are up early before daylight to light the fires and bake the bread. Mary and I bargain with the merchants in town to get the best prices for what we need, and we trade our own produce too. We were all taught from an early age how to sew, to make garments for everyone who lives here, to spin good wool and weave fine cloth to clothe everyone in the household. What is left we sell and trade with. We bake, we cook, we clean, and we tend to the livestock. Our days are long, but we are blessed beyond measure by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The men work hard too of course ploughing the fields, harvesting the crops, there is no time to be idle here.

My story begins when I got word that the teacher was leaving Jerusalem and would be heading in this direction. That's what Mary and I called Him 'The Teacher' you will understand why as I relay my story. There was not one opportunity missed by Jesus to use as a teaching moment for those around Him and I was one of the many who learned so much from Him.

Back to the task ahead we had guests coming and I needed to make sure we pulled out all the stops. This was going to be an important day, but I did not realise that it was going to change my life forever. The teacher was a very important man, a stranger yes, but not for long as He became great friends with Lazarus my brother and so in turn with Mary and me. Jesus was a Rabbi and we had heard many stories about His teaching. Now He and His disciples were on their way to our house and there was much to be done.

We had time to prepare which meant that I could choose the best meat and we could bake the bread fresh. I left instructions for the bedrooms

to be aired out and made up with fresh bedding just in case we could persuade them to rest and stay a while as Abraham had done all of those years ago. Preparation means you are never caught out when an unexpected guest arrives, and you never know what the needs of that guest will be, so we cover all bases. Mary and I were off to the market there were fresh vegetable, spices and wine to be bought and so with two servants to assist us and a shopping list each, we agreed to meet in front of the local inn to travel back together.

Mary was very excited about the visit too. We spent the journey back planning the meal and where everyone would sit. I wanted to get out the finest dishes and linen for the banquet and we needed to make sure that the guests' feet were washed the instant they arrived for comfort. Mary and I discussed towels and bowls and dishes and bread. How much was too much, 'better to be looking at it than for it', I always said. Let's face it if we don't use it today, we can eat it for lunch tomorrow. There was always a great atmosphere when there was a party to prepare for. Mary had wondered if our other friends might drop in on the off chance of meeting the teacher because that would mean more guests than just the followers who were coming with him. This sent me into a bit of a panic on the inside, just for a moment. Then my head went back into organising mode and the solution was to cook an extra dish, add more salad and bread. As for sleeping space if we needed more, I would bunk up with Mary and Lazarus and some of the male servants could go into the barn with some blankets and make their beds in the hay. Sure, it wouldn't be the first time. When we arrived home, we knew exactly what needed to be done and we got on with the tasks ahead with great excitement. Mary took some of the servants and began preparing the beds and towels she sent for the water for washing and drinking. I moved into the kitchen and began the preparation of the banquet. Mary would join me later after the guests had arrived.

Everything was moving along well when Mary came running into the kitchen, 'they are here Martha, the teacher is here, come and see'. Washing my hands and patting down my hair I rushed to welcome our

guests. A quick glance around and I realised that Mary had everything and everyone in place and the guests' feet were being washed and pitchers of water were being poured and I breathed a sigh of relief. So far so good. I relaxed and began with the pleasantries, you know, 'how was your journey, you must be hot in this heat, please sit-down rest a while in the shade.'

Then I came face to face with Him, The Teacher. For the first time today, I was speechless. He smiled at me, and it was as though time stood still. I knew instantly I was in the presence of greatness, this man was going to be more than a guest passing through. His smile was warm and genuine, inviting in some way snapping back into the present I realised He was speaking. He was thanking me for inviting Him and his followers into our home. Embarrassed by the little noise that was coming out of my mouth I babbled something about 'you are all very welcome, it's no trouble at all, make yourselves at home' and ran off back to the kitchen in a panic to check there was enough food and wine to keep us going for the rest of the day.

I have this gift of overdoing it when it comes to the food, I never underestimate the amount but the panic always set in around this point and when I realised that this was no ordinary travelling itinerant preacher or teacher, well you can only imagine if you haven't experienced my kitchen antics.

What a palaver took place from this point onwards. Everything needed to be perfect, and I felt that I had not done enough nor was I prepared for such an honoured guest. I don't know where it all came from, but I suddenly started to bark orders at the servants, rushing around the kitchen which is never productive. I wanted everything to be just right it was important to me that I impressed Jesus. Chaos ensued as I spilt the soup and broke a dish and where was Mary? she was supposed to be helping me. Everything needed to be perfect why was Mary not helping me make it perfect? I cleaned up the mess and went looking for her. Have you seen Mary? What is she doing? Where could she be? I thought all of the rooms were made up.



The men would be reclining at the table by now and there was so much more to do what will they think if we take much longer to serve the food? They will think we are incompetent and unable to run a house, that's what they will think. We have a reputation to consider, and Mary is nowhere to be seen. I was in one of the bedrooms which Mary had sorted, and it looked amazing by the way. She had placed a sprig of lavender in the corner to give the room a fresh aroma, I remember thinking, 'nice touch', when one of the servants said that they hadn't seen her come out of the main room again after the men had gone into the banqueting hall to sit together. I rushed to find her maybe something had happened, and she would need help. Oh no what if something had gone wrong, let's face it Mary knew she needed to help me in the kitchen only a disaster would have stopped her from coming to help. I rushed to where the men were now surrounding Jesus and He had already begun to teach.

Skirting quietly round the outside of the group looking for spilled water or broken dishes Mary was nowhere to be seen. Then I suddenly realised that she was on the floor in the middle of the crowd at the feet of Jesus listening to His teaching. What on earth is she doing there? This is highly inappropriate; she shouldn't be taking a position at His feet not when there is work to be done. Not even if there was no work to be done. Has she lost her mind? I was so angry at her I lost my mind. In fact, I lost control all together. I went straight up to our illustrious guest and pointed out that my lazy sister should be helping me.

Suddenly there was silence. Everyone in the room was looking directly at Jesus waiting for His response to being dragged into this domestic dispute. You will have to imagine what came next as I try to describe it to you because at this point there was a powerful intervention. Jesus looked directly at me and called me by name not once but twice. 'Martha, Martha', He said. His words were like thunder to my ears. Not angry, not even loud but you know when thunder starts to rumble on a hot day. Imagine the heat, the dry riverbeds, and thirsty animals everyone can almost smell the rain as the rumble begins. All of creation knows that the fresh wind of a storm is needed to clear the air sometimes,



you know to remove the sticky humidity that sucks the life out of everything. In the tension of the quiet room and with great authority He continued. Speaking of the turmoil that I had been in since I met Him an hour earlier, he said, ‘You are worried and upset about many things.’ At that moment I realised that not only did He know my name, but He knew me. It was as though He had heard my thoughts, known my panic and He had certainly heard my bad attitude when I barked at Him to help me fix it. This is where the fresh wind of this storm began to blow with His assurance. ‘Few things are needed’, He said. He poured out the refreshing rain of contentment as He helped me see what was needed. ‘Or indeed only one’, He continued. Instantly I knew that the one thing needed was Jesus. Confirmation and contentment in knowing this washed away the madness of the previous hour and the craziness of ‘What I’ thought was important compared to what really was. Mary understood but I had not and in the gentleness of His words and actions towards me at that moment I knew that Mary had chosen the better way because Jesus had said it. My troubled, worried heart and mind was settled at that moment, all panic and pride in what I was doing was quieted as my spirit was soothed by the grace and time taken to help me understand. He had welcomed Mary when she had joined Him just as He welcomed me. Doing what I was doing was not wrong, but I had become so emersed in the doing that I was missing out on the listening that was a challenge to my world that day. A combination of doing and listening is the only way to understand what is required of me as a servant of God. Mary and I sat together after this, side by side, in His presence as He continued to teach. The nourishment and comfort for the guests was still accomplished and no one went hungry or thirsty. There was more hospitality than I could ever have imagined, planned, or orchestrated, and it included the generosity of the teacher towards me, as my spirit was renovated and restored by all that I heard.

When our guests had gone and the everything returned to normal, we had plenty of visitors come and go who brought tales of the ministry and testimonies of healings and miracles. We sent food packages and money to support the ministry and we were thankful to have been chosen to serve when the opportunity arose. Our whole household did

this with great joy that such a blessing had been given to us. And Jesus and the disciples returned many times during His time of ministry to rest and eat and fellowship with us.

Months had passed since we had seen Jesus when Lazarus became ill. At first, we tended to his sickness in the usual way but when we realised that rest and TLC was not going to be enough, we sent for the local physician to come. What he said shocked both Mary and me because there was nothing he could do. Now those are not words you want to hear when a young fit man suddenly takes to his bed. You want to hear the reassurance that bed rest and chicken soup will do the trick. In our desperation we sent for Jesus. He had healed the sick, the blind could see, the possessed had been delivered and found clarity of mind at His touch. Surely, He could heal Lazarus. We sent out a messenger to find him and made sure that He understood the urgency. We instructed the messenger to tell Jesus that Lazarus the one He loved was sick. We knew that Jesus loved us, He had told us this many times in His communications with us. What I didn't understand was why He didn't leave where He was and come straight to us.

The messenger returned and told us that He would be staying where He was a couple more days and that the sickness would not end in death. How could He know that He hadn't seen Lazarus and since we had sent the messenger Lazarus had deteriorated badly. I wondered if Jesus had held off because of the last time He came to Judea. We weren't thinking about the crowd who tried to stone Him maybe it would be too dangerous for Him to come back, but Mary and I are desperate as our brother is slipping away. It was too late now to think of such things He was coming and that was all that mattered.

We sat by Lazarus' bed praying that Jesus would hurry. Then suddenly he was gone. We watched him take his final breath begging him to hold on promising him Jesus was coming, and now it was too late. Jesus just didn't make it on time. Such sadness overwhelmed our household that day. Many came and paid their respects and we arranged for Lazarus to be buried in the family tomb. It is so hard to describe the pain of

losing your brother and be polite and hospitable amid great sadness. I suppose we did it all automatically. We just got on with it, Mary, and me.

It was four days after the funeral of Lazarus that we got word that Jesus would arrive soon. Mary couldn't face seeing Him so as the oldest I went out to meet Him. As I approached Jesus, He stood with His arms wide open and in the hug that He gave me I knew that His heart was also broken at the loss of His friend. Through my tears I assured Him that I knew if He had been here Lazarus would not have died. I still believed that Jesus would have been able to heal him it was just unfortunate that Jesus had not made it on time. I was not angry I was just so sad that this was not going to be one of the healings that people were testifying to. I wanted Jesus to know that I still had faith that God would give Him all that He asked for and I told Him this. Jesus replied with 'he will live again'. Knowing that my brother would rise again in the resurrection on the last day did bring great comfort but again I wasn't fully listening.

Jesus' words were stronger and clarifying and now to get my attention, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.' Then He asked me, 'Do you believe this?'. Well, my answer could only be one thing, 'yes Lord, I believe you are the Messiah who has come into the world.' My anxious spirit quieted in His presence and I knew that Mary needed this reassurance too, so I ran to the house to get her. When we reached Jesus, Mary fell at His feet weeping and in great distress. When Jesus saw the mourners who followed her who were also weeping and in great distress He was moved by such grief and began to weep with them.

What happened next needed to be seen to be believed the people who had followed had started to question among themselves. Didn't Jesus make the blind man see could He not have healed His friend and stopped Him from dying?

I saw how deeply moved Jesus was by all of this and He commanded us to take Him to the tomb. Mary and I thought He was just going to mourn, to pay His last respects but when we got there, He ordered the unthinkable. He asked for the stone to be removed from the cave.

I reminded Him that Lazarus had been dead for 4 days and that the smell alone would be horrendous if we opened the tomb now. He turned and looked directly at me and His words I will never forget, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed then you would see the Glory of God.'

At this moment Jesus looked to the sky and thanked God for hearing Him so that those around would see and believe that He was sent from God. I quickly looked at Mary and then the opening to the cave as the next words out of Jesus' mouth boomed again with thunderous authority into the darkness of the burial cave, 'LAZARUS COME OUT'. Moments later my brother walked out of that grave. He was still bound in his burial clothes but there was no stench of death, there was no deterioration, Lazarus was completely whole and healed of the affliction that had brought death to his body. Then Jesus commanded that the people remove his burial clothes and let him go. There he stood before us whole, the chains of death had been removed and God was truly glorified in the resurrection of my brother.

This testimony spread like wildfire among the people, and many believed, but this meant that Jesus could not move freely among the people. He and his disciples had to go to a town called Ephraim. Although persecuted before Jesus was now on the most wanted list in Jerusalem and there was a warrant out for His arrest. We weren't to know that the next time we saw Him would be the last. The resurrection of our brother had put ever increasing pressure on the Sanhedrin to do something about Jesus before it was too late.

About 6 days before the Passover, Jesus and the disciples returned for what was His final meal with us. Mary and I knew He was coming, and we prepared, as we always did with great joy and anticipation.

During the meal Mary got up and left the room. When she returned, she kneeled at the feet of Jesus again. This time I continued serving no longer annoyed by the deviation from the plans. Yes, I still make plans, but I now allow for wiggle room and grace when plans change unexpectedly. Especially when it concerns Jesus.

Back to the story. Mary comes in with the jar containing the pure nard perfumed oil, there would have been about pint in the jar. This was the same burial perfume that we had used on my brother 3 weeks earlier. In an act of pure love, and extravagant worship, and total adoration for her Saviour she poured the whole jar over his feet. She was already bowed low before him as she was on her knees but what she did next brought tears to my eyes as I could only stand back and watch proudly as my little sister honoured the one who had resurrected our brother. She removed her head covering and the clips from her hair. Her hair had not been cut since the day she was born and now she was using it to anoint and wipe the feet of the Messiah. I will leave that image there as this is Mary's story to tell but I knew at this moment we would not see Him again after this day. we had received word that Lazarus was now also in danger. There was a plot to kill him and Jesus. Jesus for performing the miracle and Lazarus for receiving it. The ability to destroy this testimony by killing Lazarus and turning it into a myth before too many people saw the truth with their own eyes was the goal of the Sanhedrin. Now danger lurked in every corner for the two men that I loved, and it would be too dangerous for them to be caught together. Mary knew this too. She honoured Jesus now in front of all who observed with surrender and abandonment of tradition.

In six days', time there would be the Passover feast, Jesus and the disciples would not be joining us as they will be going to Jerusalem. We said our goodbyes to Jesus and the disciples and went about preparing Lazarus for his journey. We were sending him into hiding with family that could be trusted. We had already lost our brother once and we needed to make sure that did not happen again at the hands of the Sanhedrin.

The day after the Passover we were sent word of the death of our friend Jesus. As sad as we were remembered the promise of resurrection and knew that He is not gone forever. We had witnessed it firsthand we had hope beyond measure. Three days later word of His resurrection filtered through, and we rejoiced in the good news. We got word to Lazarus of course and word spread.

It is still spreading 2000 years later have you heard it. The Jesus who resurrected my brother from death is still resurrecting not. I've witnessed it have you?



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