MARY OF BETHANY: REVELATION! *John 11*

Lazarus was ill. Martha and I soon realised it wasn't just some passing ailment but actually life threatening. If only we could tell Jesus for we believed he could heal him from wherever he was at the time, but we dared not leave Lazarus, we wanted and needed to be together. We knew Jesus well, - he often stayed with us in Bethany, - we were barely two miles from Jerusalem, and on his visits there he would always drop by. He loved Lazarus so much, as indeed he loved us.

The Passover was due, and we knew Jesus would be coming down from Galilee. We sought a friend that could go and meet him on his way down to Jerusalem. As soon as he had gone Lazarus grew worse, and we prayed so much that Jesus would heal him the moment he was told of his need. Alas, he was too late, for our dear brother died in our arms. Two days later our friend returned, confirmed he *had* told the Master, but Jesus had not come back with him. It was too late now anyway.

In times of grief no tears can replace the finality of death, no matter how many are shed. So many friends came around, their comfort was genuine, for our family was much loved. Four days passed but not the pain. We so wanted Jesus to be with us, he would understand, his love would lift us.

Word came that Jesus was at last approaching. I was too sad to leave the house, but Martha went. She returned, saying quietly to me that Jesus had asked to see me in the place where he had met with her. I wrapped a cloak around me and we went together, - but the mourners had seen us leave and all followed, assuming we were going to the grave.

How to describe that short walk! My thoughts so full of sadness, despair, so many questions, - still the constant "Why? Why? Why?" I kept searching the horizon, and finally saw him with his disciples. As we got nearer he looked at me, his arms outstretched in love. When I reached him, I fell down at his feet, my tears uncontrollable, my thoughts confused and accusatory *"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."*

LORD, IF THOU HADST BEEN HERE, MY BROTHER HAD NOT DIED

Jesus looked down at me, at the other mourners, and simply asked ***"Where have you laid him?"*** The mourners with us said they would show him, tears and cries echoing round.

Jesus wept.

I'd never seen him so affected. I felt his love and compassion, but also amidst my tears the sudden wonderment that his sorrow was for our lack of understanding, our lack of faith. He reached down to me and took me by both hands, lifting me up, squeezing my hands with assurance. Oh, dear friends, he still had that air of authority, - he was so at one with his Father even now. I didn't know what to expect, - what could he do? How could he give me that look of assurance when Lazarus was dead? He walked with us to the grave. We stood at the memorial.

"Take ye away the stone."

Martha recoiled, sharing her concern, fearful for the smell of Lazarus four days incarcerated in the stone tomb: he was dead, four days dead, and that was surely it. She was, as ever, making herself responsible for all the practicalities, - she was looking round at everyone hiding her grief through enforced activity. He responded to her, but my heart leapt with his words: ***"Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"*** Yes, I thought, his tears had been for us and not for Lazarus! He was always just seeing the glory of God, had never feared for Lazarus! But it was us that saw him die.

The heavy stone was moved away from the entrance to the tomb. Despite the heat of the day, the random insects hovering in the air, there was no smell, no sudden gathering of flies. Just an empty black tomb. All eyes turned to Jesus.

I was next to him, feeling his calm, aware of his natural authority. Watching. I had stopped weeping, somehow just knowing that something special was about to happen. He held his hands aloft in prayer, lifted his eyes to heaven, and spoke: ***"Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me".*** He was giving gratitude to God! Why? What had he seen that we hadn't? What had he asked of God? ***"And I knew that Thou hearest me always:"*** What a statement of truth, simply acknowledging his natural communion with his heavenly Father, what comfort that must ever bring! Was it

true just for him or for all of us? ***"but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent me."*** Again, that ready and so simple fact, - he has been sent from God for us and he had a mission to fulfil.

LAZARUS, COME FORTH

A feeling of Love swept over everyone gathered there, - Love that contained within it the essence of Life. It was the presence of God made manifest. It just seemed so natural when Jesus cried out with a loud voice: ***"Lazarus, come forth."***

His command was as simple as though Lazarus had just been hiding in the tomb and it was time he came out to greet everyone. There were gasps and cries of amazement. Everyone looked at one another in disbelief at this command. Then Lazarus emerged, just came out, still bound with graveclothes but moving out and towards us, his face hidden by a napkin. The incredible was happening! Further cries of amazement! When you see the seeming impossible, everything seems to stop, time stands still. But I knew deep within it was going to happen. Everything Jesus had ever said to me suddenly seemed so relevant and true.

LOOSE HIM AND LET HIM GO

"Loose him and let him go."

Martha was there first, immediately by his side, unwinding the linen cloths, embracing him as soon as he was free. I ran too, joyously helping, as was Lazarus, to throw off the cloths, - his face shining and smiling and just looking with amazement at all around him. He was formed anew, - no evidence of the illness, just his old loving self! Hugging and kissing, kissing and hugging, Martha, Lazarus and I together again!

I turned back to Jesus, fresh tears in my eyes, but oh such happy ones! While the others gathered round Lazarus, asking questions, oh so many questions, I walked back to where Jesus was standing and looked into his eyes. We were at one, as though in another world. His look was of such love, and we spoke quietly. I saw for the first time his absolute humility, his complete unity with God, felt our unity with God. I remembered his words earlier "*Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me",* and I felt that presence of God even more closely, recognised that life was part of what we are in God - that in Jesus' eyes Lazarus had never died, had never been separate from God. He looked at me, saw my true life at one with his Father, and yes, I saw it too. There was no separation. Here was the Master, the promised Messiah. He had had no need to hurry back to us because he understood Lazarus had *always* been well. His command "Loose him and let him go" had new meaning, - loose him from all mortal thought, see him as he is, and he will be free. It also applied to me, how I thought about myself!

I looked round again and saw Lazarus, Martha, and all our friends just so happy!

My tears were no more, my inner peace complete. The four days of utter grief now vanished in the triumph of renewed life, a recognition that had Jesus healed Lazarus sooner the miracle would have been just one of many. But this! After four days!

The absolute proof to all of us that life *is* eternal!

God and man are one!

GOD AND MAN ARE ONE!

"….AND NOTHING SHALL BY ANY MEANS HURT YOU."