

# MARTHA AND MARY

## LUKE 10:38-42, JOHN 11:1-43

Women in the Bible Series

### OPENING PRAYER

Jesus, our liberator, free us from the bonds we use to restrict ourselves and others from expressing the talents and gifts which you have given us.

### EXEGESIS (POEM)

They said I was lazy/ That I hated housework  
They were right. Still do.  
Never could see why being/ Born a woman  
Meant I/ Not only had to cook/ But like it too.

Lazarus was my champion, My hero;  
He'd do anything for adventure  
Climb trees, Catch frogs.  
Me too; Never left his side.  
They tried/ To separate us/ When they made him learn/ Torah  
Didn't work.

I stayed behind the curtain/ Learning for him. Lazarus hated books.  
I'd cover my lips, Stifling answers/ Probing questions  
Pass scraps of parchment to him/ Through the curtain.  
I would have made a good rabbi. I grasped the complexities  
Of Torah/ Quicker than my brother.

Why did I always/ Have to hide/ My mind?  
You taught me/ Right out in front. Drew away the curtains  
From my spirit, From my brain. You are  
My light.

### REFLECTION

The approach that I am taking to these reflections is one of imaginative reflection. The Bible passages are used as a springboard for the heart to leap into a relationship with Jesus, using the soul rather than the mind. This does not imply that the brain is not involved, but it is not the primary controller of the process. The poems which form the basis of the reflections on the Bible stories focus on women about whom little is known. They are not based on facts, but I invite us to interact with them as if we knew more about their motivations, and to see what light

they might throw on our own thoughts and actions.

Jesus clearly spent time with the family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany. Both Luke and John record Jesus as visiting their home, once as a surprise visit and later when Lazarus has died. In both passages, the two sisters play quite distinctive and controversial roles.

For this study, let us look at Mary. In the Luke passage, her sister reports her to Jesus for not helping, but commends her for choosing the good part. In John, where she is identified with the woman who wiped Jesus' feet with her hair, she reproaches Jesus for not having come on time to save her brother's life.

In the poem, I portray Mary as a rebel with an intellect, who rejects the conventions about women's education to learn in secret, and who honours Jesus as a liberator who allows her to learn out in the open.

Are there those whom we still 'box in' because of gender, class, ethnicity or other reasons and refuse to allow them to express their minds or their creativity? Are there those whom we allow to 'box us in'? How does Jesus bring freedom?

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## CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for making each one of us unique.  
Thank you for our many gifts and thank you for what delights us and brings us joy.  
Amen.

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Evie Vernon blogs for USPG at <http://blog.weareus.org.uk/wpress/>

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