

**5 Lent**  
**April 6, 2025**

**Sermon by Rev. Steve Seibert**

*We have now been journeying with Jesus and the disciples to Jerusalem for five weeks, after coming down from the mountain where we went to pray with Jesus. Today, we have been invited to a meal at the home of Lazarus. Sounds pretty good. But the setting is unlike any we have ever experienced or will ever experience again. Among the guests is one who has died and been resurrected and one who **will die** and be resurrected. But rather than me telling you this story, let's hear from one of the residents of this home.*

Shalom, my friends! I am Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Welcome to our home, the home we have known for all of our lives. I remember the first time we met Jesus. My sister, Martha, ever the gracious host, invited him to stay with us. In our culture, it is almost always the men who meet to discuss spiritual matters such as how we honor God, how God calls us to treat our neighbor, what God expects of us in our daily lives. When that kind of talk begins, as women we are expected to help in the preparation of the meal. But when Jesus came to our home, I stayed in the room and heard the deep truths about which he was speaking. What I remember the most is that he treated me with dignity and respect; his words touched me in my spirit and in my heart.

However, Martha came into the room and told Jesus that he should send me to help her serve; she kind of felt that Jesus owed her that and that I was not serving as I should. Though gentle in his reply, Jesus told Martha that so many things can distract us. Good things can distract us from the best things. He defended my choice to stay and listen to him. I believe he was also inviting Martha, my sister, who is so hospitable, to slow down and listen. I have never forgotten that.

Over the next few years, the three of us got to be good friends with Jesus. On occasion, Jesus would stop in for a meal. But just a few weeks ago, Lazarus got very sick. So sick that we thought he might die. So Martha and I sent a message to Jesus asking him to come and heal our brother. We knew that it was dangerous for Jesus to come to our home in Bethany but we were so worried about Lazarus. Jesus did come, but not right away, and our worst fears were realized when our brother died. We had already anointed Lazarus with nard and buried him when we heard news of Jesus' arrival. I was still overcome with grief and, though I hesitate to tell you, I was angry with Jesus for not coming here when my brother was still alive. Martha headed out to meet Jesus while I stayed at home.

After a while, Martha came back home and said to me, 'The Master is here and is calling you.' I went to meet Jesus and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' As

we went to Lazarus' tomb, even Jesus wept. Jesus surprised us all by asking for the stone sealing the tomb to be moved away. Martha tried to convince Jesus that it was too late but he insisted we open my brother's tomb. He then spoke loudly, 'Lazarus, come out!' I don't know what I expected but I did not expect to see my brother, wrapped in burial garments, walk out of that tomb. My tears of weeping became tears of joy as Martha and I rushed to his side and took off his burial garments. Jesus, the gentle teacher who had allowed me to sit and listen to him, had called my brother back to life from death! I knew then that anything I could do for Jesus would never be too much.

Dear friends as you come in to our home and take a seat, I want you to know that we are fast approaching Passover, a time of praising God and remembering when God set us free from our bondage in Egypt. In the next week, many of us will be traveling to Jerusalem for this sacred celebration. This year feels a little different, though. I have heard that our leaders were angry with Jesus for his teachings and even for bringing my brother Lazarus back to life. How can that be?

Please excuse me for a few minutes. I want to show Jesus how grateful that I am to him. I will return to you.

*As you find a place to sit, Mary comes back into the room with a small jar with some sort of ointment in it. She kneels at the feet of Jesus and begins to rub some of the ointment on to Jesus' feet. The aroma in the room is wonderful. Then you hear someone speaking loudly. "Why was this perfume not sold for 300 denarii and the money given to the poor?" Three hundred denarii are one year's wages.*

*There is an awkward silence, and then you hear a voice, gentle yet with authority saying, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so she could keep it for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'*

*You realize that voice belongs to Jesus. You like him sticking up for Mary. And even if Mary doesn't quite understand, you have some idea what Jesus is talking about when he speaks of 'the day of my burial'. After all, we are journeying with Jesus towards Jerusalem and ultimately, his crucifixion.*

*And here is Mary, speaking to you again.*

I was so glad to be able to show Jesus how much I appreciate him. I was kind of stunned when Judas said I was wasting that nard on Jesus. In some ways, I understand his viewpoint. Nard is expensive, made from flowers that grow in mountains very far away. But this was something I chose to do for Jesus. Not something I took from someone else. You didn't hear my brother Lazarus or my sister Martha objecting to what I was doing. And you certainly didn't hear Jesus object to my anointing of his feet.

I thank you again for accepting our hospitality, for being a part of this dinner we gave to honor our dear friend and teacher, Jesus. Thank you also for sharing a meal with our brother Lazarus. We could not have imagined a few short weeks ago that we would be sharing a meal with him. Jesus has given him back to us. And dear friends, Lazarus, Martha and I all realize that one day we will all die. Even Lazarus will die again. But Martha has shared the words of Jesus when he came to us after Lazarus had died. He said,

**I am the resurrection and life.**

**Anyone who believes in me,  
even though that person dies, will live,  
and no one who lives and believes in me will ever die.**

Shalom, my friends.

*Mary has shared much with us about this dinner and the events leading up to this breaking of the bread. What else might we take from this story? Who might you identify with today? How about Judas, who appears already to have moved on from the miracle of Lazarus resurrection. Are we losing sight of what God has done in our lives?*

*Mary, the gentle sister who is extravagant in showing her love for Jesus.*

*Martha, her organized and hospitable sister, who may at times focus on serving others when Jesus says it's okay to take some time for yourself.*

*Maybe Lazarus. We know of no spectacular action that he has undertaken. Yet, Jesus loves him deeply and has returned him to life. Has God moved some powerful way in your life?*

*Can you truly accept that Jesus loves you deeply, simply by being who you are?*

*Allow me to close with a few thoughts about Jesus:*

- ❖ *He has allowed himself to be anointed by a woman, when the standards of the day say it must be a man who anoints him.*
- ❖ *Jesus takes the time to be in community and to receive joy, even this late in his journey. Jesus is showing us that such relationships are holy.*

❖ *He takes the time to answer Judas' objection. Please, let's be clear. Jesus is not saying we should ignore the poor of the world. He is saying that loving extravagantly is always the right choice. Amen.*