

Mary's Tale

Peter Tickler comments:

“This famous encounter in Luke is short, and so gives the story-teller plenty of opportunity to imagine (i.e. make things up!). What really strikes me about the Luke passage, is that I do quite sympathise with Martha’s situation. And I also wonder what her reaction to Jesus’s words were. Luke doesn’t really give us the full story, or even an end to the story. He merely gives us Jesus’ admonitory words, presumably because that was what he felt was important. I didn’t feel I could leave Martha high and dry. So I have made up what happened next. Sorry!”

My sister Martha likes to get things right. Absolutely, totally, not a thing out of place, right. And when she’s got everything done, everything absolutely ready, she’ll find something else to do.

So, when Jesus came to our village and wanted to stop at her house for a while, well you can imagine.

She rushed into the shop, squealing like I don’t know what.

“Oh Mary, Mary. Jesus is coming to stay and I haven’t got anything ready. You must help.”

I’d heard about Jesus. Who hadn’t? He’d healed cripples and lepers, cast out devils, even turned water into wine at a wedding - so they said! Anyway, I shut up shop as soon as I could, and tramped up the hill to her house.

He and his followers were already there. He was standing in the middle of them all in the courtyard, a drink in his hand.

I went straight up to him “So you’re Jesus. I’m Mary. Martha’s sister.”

“Pleased to meet you, Mary.” He smiled. He had a dark beard and black, curly hair.

Rather nice in a rugged sort of way.

“They say you do miracles,” I babbled. “They say you turned water into wine, but they don't say how good looking you are!” There’s nothing that a man likes more than to be flattered.

He grinned. “Well you’re kind of attractive yourself too.” He paused, and then bent his head down towards mine, and spoke in a loud, exaggerated whisper so that everyone could hear. “But as my mama told me when she first sent me to buy oil at the market, don’t believe everything you’re told.”

I was startled. “What do you mean? Don't you do miracles then? Didn’t you turn water into wine?”

He laughed. In fact they were all laughing now. And the joke, as I soon discovered, was on me.

“Not me Mary. You’ve got the wrong man. I’m Peter. He’s the water into wine man.” And he pointed to a man sitting on the floor in the corner.

The man was looking at me, and he wasn’t laughing. “It’s nice to meet you, Mary.”

I turned away, looking for Martha and an excuse to escape from my embarrassment, but the guy spoke again:

“Come and sit down, Mary. You can tell me about yourself. Unless, of course,” and his eyes sparkled as he spoke, “unless you’d rather chat up Peter.”

So I sat down, in front of him, and we just got talking. He asked me about myself and my hopes and fears, and he talked about God and the scriptures, but he didn’t seem interested in his miracles, as if they weren’t really important. But he seemed to speak with such authority and good sense.

I was so engrossed that I completely forgot about Martha and how I was meant to be helping her, but then I became aware of noise coming from the kitchen, of plates being clattered about noisily, pans being bashed, of loud grunts of irritation.

Finally, Martha burst in, pushing through and standing in the middle of us.

“Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work. Tell her to come and help me.”

“Martha,” he said, speaking with exaggerated care. “Martha. You are all worked up about the preparations and all sorts of things, but Mary has chosen a better course of action, to speak to and listen to me. I will not deny her that.”

“But master,” she insisted, “what about the food and the ...”

But he cut across her. “Right now, there are more important things.”

The whole room fell silent. Poor Martha. I felt sorry for her. She was red-faced from the cooking and the embarrassment and anger, and I felt sorry for her even though I knew she’s give me an earful later.

“Martha,” he said firmly. “You too should come and sit with us. Now!” And he waited until, grudgingly, she did.

“As for the food, the handsome Peter will go and look after it.”

And, to be fair to him, he did.